

# Can the Preface Broker a Realist Pact in Fantastic Fiction?

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This paper takes as its primary concern the relationship between prefaces, realism, and what Tzvetan Todorov terms “fantastic fiction.” Understood as the “hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov 25), the fantastic may be found in many nineteenth-century fictional genres, from the novel of sensation to imperial gothic, colonial romance, mystery, science fiction, detective fiction and horror. Scholars have convincingly shown that the fantastic exhibits a strong reliance on realism: in order to have its highly improbable tales accepted as “true,” authors of fantastic fiction must first establish a realist pact with their reader (Brantlinger; Pykett *The Sensation Novel*; Spencer). However, these findings tend to be premised on close readings of the main text, rather than close readings of the preface or other paratextual elements. Indeed, few studies have been devoted to understanding the role of prefatory material in nineteenth-century English literature. The present study proposes an examination of two canonical works of fantastic fiction, Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1860) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).<sup>1</sup> I analyse the ways in which the paratextual apparatus plays a crucial role in establishing a realist pact with the reader before the narrative proper commences.

By elevating and valorising the preface as a key site of textual and paratextual signification, this paper reenergises existing scholarship on *The Woman in White* and *Dracula*, while arguing for greater scholarly consideration of the preface in nineteenth-century English literature. The field of paratextual studies is most closely associated with Gérard Genette, whose 1987 work *Seuils* (translated as *Paratexts* in 1997) legitimised the paratext, and prefaces more specifically, as fields of study in their own right. Although his was not the first (see, for example, the work of Jacques Derrida [1972] and Henri Mitterand [1975]), Genette’s monograph was—and remains—the most wide-ranging treatment of prefatory material to date. Though some have challenged Genette’s adoption of a synchronic approach to the paratext (see Robert Allen) and others have developed Genette’s work further (Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, for instance, proposes a taxonomy of the preface), the study of prefaces and paratextual material more broadly continues to be a marginal pursuit. Consideration of the preface, as this paper demonstrates, shines new light on the relationship between realism and the fantastic in nineteenth-century literature, as well as lending further nuance to Genette’s theorisation of the paratext.

Early reviews of *Dracula* note Collins’s probable influence on Stoker’s compositional strategies (especially those Collins developed through *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*).<sup>2</sup> Stoker undoubtedly read *The Woman in White* (Skal 52) and he reviewed its

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<sup>1</sup> In-text citations refer to the 1975 Oxford University Press edition of *The Woman in White*, edited by Harvey Peter Sucksmith and the 2009 Penguin Books edition of *Dracula*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spectator*, 31 July 1897: “Mr Bram Stoker gives us the impression [...] to ‘go one better’ than Wilkie Collins (whose method of narration he has closely followed)...” *The Bookman* 12 August 1897: “Since Wilkie Collins left us we have had no tale of mystery so liberal in matter and so closely woven. But with the intricate plot, and the methods of the narrative, the resemblance to stories of the author of ‘The Woman in White’ cease; for the audacity and the horror of ‘Dracula’ are Mr. Stoker’s

stage adaptation in 1872 (Wynne 29-31). The close relationship between the two novels means that they have often been studied together.<sup>3</sup> Alison Case describes *The Woman in White* as *Dracula*'s "most significant Victorian precursor" (240n5) and Scott Rogers views *Dracula*'s epistemological architecture as "an outgrowth of Collins's brand of sensation fiction" (11). Mina Harker bears the imprint of a true "Wilkie Collins detective" (Rogers 25). David Seed (64, 67, 68, 73) and Rosemary Jann (278, 285n15) use *The Woman in White* as a counter-example to bring into relief the narrative specificities of *Dracula*. For example, Seed shows that Stoker—unlike Collins in *The Woman in White*—allows "the pattern of events to emerge well before the end of the novel" (67). As many of these scholars note, both novels are structured as a series of narratives or testimonies that take the form of diary pages, newspaper transcripts and letters. In each case, these narrative fragments are ordered and edited by one of the characters. Moreover, *The Woman in White* and *Dracula* share similar prefatory strategies that earnestly seek to establish the veracity of the text that follows, allaying, in advance, any doubts the fantastic storyline may occasion.

It is possible to trace an ongoing concern with the creation—and maintenance—of "an illusion of verisimilitude" within fantastic fiction of the Victorian era (Pykett, "Sensation and the Fantastic" 206).<sup>4</sup> Pykett stresses that though this structure "bear[s] many marks of realism, it is not the totalizing realism that we tend to associate with the mid-Victorian novel" (*The Sensation Novel* 38). The fragments which compose the whole in *The Woman in White* and *Dracula* are subjective accounts, as is the underlying "imperative," namely, "the desire of the hero/detective/narrator to assert his mastery over experience and events by making them tell his story" (38). To put this another way: though each novel's meta-structure may strive to produce a "reality effect" (Morris 97), we should be wary of any claims to objectivity that this approach purports to engender. Pykett's critique thus provides a productive lens for understanding the prefatory discourse at work in both novels, not to mention the similarities between textual and paratextual material; both rely on certain "reality effects" to render plausible the implausible.

While Todorov has been influential in defining the field of fantastic fiction, neither his formulation, cited at the beginning of this paper, nor his methodology have been universally accepted. Pykett expresses scant interest in his "attempt to theorize a transhistorical genre of the 'fantastic'" ("Sensation and the Fantastic" 192), while Rosemary Jackson asserts that he "fails to consider the social and political implications of literary forms" (6). Jackson instead prefers to see the fantastic as "a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss"; it "traces the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent" (3-4). Despite their objections, both Jackson and Pykett ultimately come to an understanding of the fantastic that is broad enough to

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own" (qtd. in Senf *The Critical Response* 60-1). Elizabeth Miller's *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Documentary Volume* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005) provides a comprehensive survey of *Dracula* reviews.

<sup>3</sup> Bollen and Ingelbien; Hennelly "Twice-Told Tales"; Hughes "Habituation." Numerous others note it in passing: Hennelly, "Reading Detection" 466n7; Hughes, *Bram Stoker - Dracula* 1, 125; *Bram Stoker's Dracula* 15-6, 26; Johnson, "Bent and Broken" 236; "Dual Life" 24; Maunder 45.

<sup>4</sup> Although Pykett's comments are made in reference to *The Woman in White*, they also apply to *Dracula*.

encompass a wide range of genres,<sup>5</sup> essentially mirroring its use by Todorov, and by extension, this paper.

It is widely accepted, as Sue Lonoff observes, that novelists such as Collins “needed realistic details to make their multiple narratives more credible and fend off attacks by their critics” (147). These “reality effects” constitute those “intrinsic, formal aspects” of the novel “[which create] the effect of ‘being just like life’” (Morris 97). Jackson, like Morris and Lonoff, has been influential in emphasising the relationship between the fantastic and realism:

[the fantastic narrative’s] means of establishing its ‘reality’ are initially mimetic (‘realist,’ presenting an ‘object’ world ‘objectively’) but then move into another mode which would seem to be marvellous (‘unrealistic,’ representing apparent impossibilities), were it not for its initial grounding in the real. (20)

The critical reflex amongst all three theorists, however, is to treat the establishment and maintenance of these “realistic details” or “reality effects” as the province of the main text. In this paper, I suggest that a crucial note of realism is introduced earlier than most scholars anticipate, namely amongst the novels’ *paratextual* material, specifically the prefatory discourse. Of course, it is not unusual to ascribe such a function to a preface: Genette considers the creation of just such a pact to be one of the preface’s primary functions (215). Accordingly, my interest in this paper is to demonstrate that the contract of realism established by the preface is crucial to *The Woman in White* and *Dracula* being read as fantastic.

The paratext comprises a “certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations” that “surround” and “extend” a text “precisely in order to *present* it” (Genette 1, original emphasis). Genette’s intricate classificatory system ranks the preface as part of the novel’s peritext. He proposes further divisions based on its form, place, time, sender and addressee. Broadly speaking, all prefaces seek to establish a pact between author and reader. Their goal is to “*ensure that the text is read properly*,” an objective encompassing “two actions . . . *to get the book read and to get the book read properly*” (197, original emphasis). For the prefaces considered here, this pact is resolutely realist, avoiding any hint of the fantastic thrills to come. The Preamble to *The Woman in White* promises a story recounted in strictest adherence to evidentiary rules in judicial proceedings: “the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness—with the same object . . . to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect” (1). Similarly, the “papers” which compose the narrative to *Dracula* may be fashioned from subjective accounts—“given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them” (6)—but the preface assures the reader that they are scrupulously, rigorously honest. Minor objections notwithstanding,<sup>6</sup> readerly agreement to this pact can be inferred by the ongoing popularity of each novel. Neither has been out of print (Wasson 24; Senf “The

<sup>5</sup> For Jackson, “fantasy is a literary mode from which a number of related genres emerge” (7). For Pykett, it is “a mode of representation which assumes a variety of different generic forms at different historical juncture, rather than as a discrete genre” (“Sensation and the Fantastic” 192).

<sup>6</sup> In an unsigned review (reproduced in Page 97-101), *The Times* revealed embarrassing chronological miscalculations in the novel’s third volume. Yet the reviewer’s jubilant (and much cited) characterisation of the novel as “a mockery, a delusion, and a snare” was followed immediately by a “vote [of] three cheers for the author . . . [Collins] will not have a reader the less, and all who read will be deceived and delighted” (101).

Unseen Face” 160; Sweet in Collins xvi) and both continue to be enthusiastically embraced by lay and academic readers alike.

### *The Woman in White*

This analysis of the prefatory material to *The Woman in White* centres on Collins’s two English-language prefaces and the novel’s “Preamble.”<sup>7</sup> *The Woman in White* was serialised in forty instalments in Charles Dickens’s *All the Year Round* from November 1859 to August 1860. In the same month as its final instalment, *The Woman in White* was published in novelised form as a three-volume edition, accompanied by a preface. A second preface, dated February 1861, was written to mark its printing in a one-volume edition. Both conform to the functions that Genette attributes to authentic authorial prefaces (197): Collins explains the novel’s genesis, outlines his literary aesthetic, defends the novel against critics, and addresses his reading public. Indeed, his defensive attitude towards reviewers goes some way to explaining his multiple prefatory sorties. In the 1860 Preface, he finds himself “desirous of addressing one or two questions, of the most harmless and innocent kind, to the Critics” (xxxvi). Thus baited, he “venture[s] to ask” if, “in the event of this book being reviewed,” the Critic refrains from “telling his story at second-hand?” (xxxvi).

For Kathleen Tillotson and Anthea Trodd, Collins’s 1860 preface was “one of the aggressive prefaces with which, throughout his career, he succeeded in antagonizing the press” (in Collins 499). And antagonise it did. Norman Page suggests that Collins’s prefatory claims

. . . did not prevent reviewers from finding many of his stories improbable and untrue to human nature, or from attacking his accuracy on matters of fact—indeed, his occasionally truculent tone may positively have encouraged them to take pains to do so. (2)

Following the publication of the three-volume edition of *The Woman in White*, a review from *The Times* brought to light a number of chronological errors in the narrative (Page 97-101). Collins checked and verified these inconsistencies. He asked his publisher to halt printing until the necessary changes could be made (Page 97; see also Sucksmith in Collins 587). Once amended, the single-volume edition with corrections and a new preface was hastily published in 1861.

The second preface may be less belligerent than its predecessor, but Collins’s polemical bent persists: he admits to the “rectifi[cation]” of “certain technical errors” but refutes “doubts” raised “in certain captious quarters, about the correct presentation of the legal ‘points’ incidental to the story” (xxxvii). Collins may have resented what he saw as critical nit-picking, but it nonetheless contributed to a more cohesive narrative. Additionally, his 1861 response to reviewers opens new avenues for affirming the novel’s realism. He testily insists that his writing was thoroughly checked both before and after publication: “the ‘law’ in this book has been discussed, since its publication, by more than one competent tribunal, and has been decided to be sound” (xxxvii). Irrespective of whether this professional oversight was

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<sup>7</sup> A little-known third preface was written by Collins in French on the occasion of the novel’s French-language publication in June 1861. This preface is *not* a translation of either English-language Preface; it was written specifically for the novel’s French readership. An electronic version is available at: <http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/WiW/frtxt.htm>

sought out by Collins or landed at his doorstep uninvited, Collins implies that his depiction of the law conforms to its function in the real world.

*The Woman in White*'s "double urge towards conventionality and innovation" (Kendrick 22) is in clear view before the narrative proper begins. In the 1860 and 1861 prefaces, Collins synthesises two seemingly opposed stances, stressing both the realism and fictiveness of *The Woman in White* whilst carefully sidestepping any mention of his sensational plot. Collins proudly declares that readers see the "Marian" and "Laura" characters as real: "I was peremptorily cautioned . . . to be careful how I treated them" (1860, xxxv). Matthew Sweet relates a neat anecdote that further highlights the prefatory intermingling of realism and fictiveness in the preface: "Collins received letters from single men demanding to know the identity of the original for his heroine Marian Halcombe, and if she would accept their hand in marriage" (in Collins xv). Here, the Marian character is simultaneously read as a fictional cipher for a putative real person and as a real person who leads a mirrored existence on and off the page. Likewise, Count Fosco appears all the more real because "many models . . . have 'sat' for him" (1860, xxxvi). In the same way that the novel's multiple narrative fragments create the novel's "reality effects," the fact that Collins consulted a range of sources when developing the character of Fosco, "some living, and some dead" (1860, xxxvi), deepens the realist pact: even the most exaggerated elements of Fosco's character such as his immense girth and menagerie of pets hold a realistic anchor.

Despite Collins's valorisation of realism in both prefaces, he refers to the novel as a fictive enterprise, using prefatory materials to rehearse "the nature and scope of his studies in narrative art" (Booth 137). For example, Collins describes *The Woman in White*'s structure as an innovation that transcends "mere novelty of form" because "the substance . . . has [also] profited by it" (1860, xxxv). Similarly, and perhaps better known, is his 1861 summation of the function of any literary enterprise: "the primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a story" (xxxviii). Collins's articulation of his literary vision suggests that the preface was more than simply a vehicle for emphasising the realist aspects of the main text and its close connection to the way things are "in the real world"; he was equally concerned with communicating his view of the main text as an explicitly fictional enterprise. The 1861 preface returns to this theme, referring to *The Woman in White* as a Story with a capitalised 'S' (xxxviii), and mentioning the names of characters within inverted commas (xxxviii). It could be argued that Collins's emphasis on the constructedness of *The Woman in White* undermines our reading of the text as in some way realist. Yet this manoeuvre bears many hallmarks of what George Levine describes as realism's self-consciousness, the knowledge shared by both author and reader that a realist text is always an inescapably fictive enterprise (15).

Genette's observation that a work "may contain several introductory discourses . . . one authorial and the other attributed to a narrator-character" (162) speaks directly to *The Woman in White*'s multiple prefatory devices. Alongside the two authentic authorial prefaces written and signed by Collins, a "Preamble" provides additional paratextual guidance.<sup>8</sup> Like the Prefaces that precede it, the Preamble presents the main text rather than participating in its action. Unlike the Prefaces, however, the Preamble concentrates solely on directing the reading of the main text. This well-defined purpose does not necessarily create a well-defined text: the Preamble is both intermittent and fixed, textual and *paratextual*; it appeals to the

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<sup>8</sup> Genette reminds us that a preface may have several "French parasynonyms," including "introduction, avant-propos, prologue, note, notice, avis, présentation, examen, préambule, avertissement, prélude, discours, préliminaire, exorde, avant-dire, proème" (161, original emphasis).

impartiality of evidentiary rules in a court of law while simultaneously casting legal objectivity into doubt (“the Law is still, in certain inevitable cases, the pre-engaged servant of the long purse” [1]). Are we to believe that legal norms and practitioners are inevitably compromised, or should we take heart from the 1861 preface’s appeal to “high judicial authority”? Before reaching the Preamble, Collin has already assured the wavering reader that “a solicitor of great experience . . . carefully guided [his] steps, whenever the course of the narrative led [him] into the labyrinth of the Law” (1861, xxxvii).

The Preamble’s indeterminacy, in other words, can be indexed across multiple axes. The severest critique comes from Walter Kendrick, who accuses it (and Collins, by extension) of a dishonest portrayal of the main text. “Everything . . . which the ‘Preamble’ guarantees evaporates during the course of the novel” (32-33). He concedes that “only at the end of the novel does its complex mosaic of corrupted words, violated spaces, broken time, and splintered space make the coherent whole which the ‘Preamble’ promised” (33). The gradual erosion of the Preamble’s realist pact forms a chief source of frustration for Kendrick. My analysis, in contrast, emphasises the Preamble’s importance in establishing a contract of realism; it is needed precisely because it helps the reader navigate the murky waters of the main text. This is not to dismiss Kendrick; rather, I offer an alternate take on his reading of the tension between realism and sensation in *The Woman in White*. Indeed, his analysis undergirds my own. He speaks of “realistic faith” in *The Woman in White* as an implicit understanding between writer and reader whereby “the language of which the fictional text is made and even the fact that it is a text should efface themselves before the illusion that what it represents is real” (21). Although sensational fiction seems a direct affront to this faith due to its melodramatic emphasis on “surprising events and extraordinary coincidences” (Pykett, “Sensation and the Fantastic” 4), Kendrick nonetheless asserts that *The Woman in White*’s apparent “departure from the realism of Trollope and George Eliot” is “founded in the realistic faith which it violates” (22). My contribution emphasises how crucial the Preamble and Preface are in building this foundation.

Collins’s belief in the inherent veracity of documentary evidence is directly analogous to his presentation of the narrative: “thus, the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in court by more than one witness” (1). Ian Watt’s important investigation into literary realism, *The Rise of the Novel*, succinctly captures the parallels between Law and realism that Collins so steadily strives for:

The novel’s mode of imitating reality may therefore be equally well summarised in terms of the procedures of another group of specialists in epistemology, the jury in a court of law. Their expectations, and those of the novel reader coincide in many ways: both want to know “all the particulars” of a given case—the time and place of the occurrence; both must be satisfied as to the identities of the parties concerned, . . . and they also expect the witnesses to tell the story “in his own words.” (31)

Given the remarkable overlap between Collins’s Preamble and Watt’s likening of realism to “the jury in a court of law,” it is tempting to read the former directly through the interpretive grille of the latter. Nonetheless, Elizabeth Ermarth’s objection bears repeating: “the problem with Watt’s reading of his own analogy . . . is that he leaves out the law. A jury establishes all the particulars not in order to verify a circumstantial view of life but in order to make a judgement as to whether or not a law has been broken.” Ermarth does not so much disagree with the choice of analogy but upholds that the goal of realism (“verify a circumstantial view of life”) is different from the goal of a court of law (“make a judgement as to whether or not a law has been broken”) (33). Watt’s analogy—together with Ermarth’s critique of it—helps to

bring out still more of the Preamble's complexities. The Preamble casts the reader as de facto judge ("as the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now" [1]), but she is as often solicited for her credulity as she is for her critique.

It is fitting that the Preamble should forge a realist pact through "the machinery of the Law" (1) because it is a species of preface already encoded with notions of legality and lawfulness. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, for example, lay bare the distinct juridical overtones of the preamble (373). Ann Gaylin likewise notes that a Preamble "usually refer[s] to the preliminary statements of a formal, legal document" (307). The pleasing symmetry between title and content takes on added significance given the title's disappearance in some editions of the novel. The serialised version published in *All the Year Round* began with a "Preamble" and a number of contemporary editions retain this convention.<sup>9</sup> Tillotson and Trodd opt for "Preamble" but disavow its usage, claiming that "in all later editions these paragraphs became the first chapter of Hartright's narrative" (Collins 1). They are partially correct: some—but not all—later editions jettison it completely. The Penguin Classics (ed. Matthew Sweet) and Oxford World's Classics (ed. John Sutherland) are cases in point, replacing "Preamble" with "The Story begun by WALTER HARTRIGHT, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing. I."

What are we to make of this discrepancy? I refer to the "Preamble" as a "Preamble" in recognition of its paratextual function and position.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that two respected scholarly editions reject "Preamble" in favour of "The Story begun by . . ." cannot be ignored. Sweet and Sutherland's editorial preference threatens to subsume this aspect of the paratext whole, representing the Preamble as part of the main text. The choice of title, therefore, carries with it the potential to transform paratext into text. It also influences the question of authorship: lacking a signature, the unsigned "Preamble" could be attributed to many hands: Walter Hartright, Wilkie Collins, or an unknown third narrator. Conversely, multiple authorship is difficult to fathom under the title "The Story begun by WALTER HARTRIGHT." Here, I support Gaylin's interpretation that "the manner in which the preamble refers to Walter in the third person continues to suggest an initial difference between this narrator and Walter" (329 n. 10). These indeterminacies foreshadow similar questions raised by *Dracula's* anonymous preface, to be discussed in the next section.

The presence of competing titles vividly demonstrates Genette's point regarding the fluidity of paratextual material: if "a paratextual element may appear at any time, it may also disappear, definitively or not, by authorial decision or outside intervention or by virtue of the eroding effect of time" (6). Further to this, "the duration of the paratext is often intermittent . . . this intermittence . . . is very closely linked to the basically functional nature of the paratext" (6-7). We see here that the very *lack* of fixity regarding the placement of this "secondary" prefatory discourse, appearing sometimes within the text and other times outside it, paradoxically becomes evidence of its inherently paratextual nature. Reference to Genette's definition of a preface—an "introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or

<sup>9</sup> See the Oxford University Press (1975), Riverside (1969) and Wordsworth (2008) editions. A facsimile of the first instalment of the serialised text is available at: [http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/etext/womaninwhite/pdf/ATYR\\_31\\_95-104.pdf](http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/etext/womaninwhite/pdf/ATYR_31_95-104.pdf). This facsimile is reproduced in the Oxford World's Classics (658) and Riverside (n.pag.) editions of *The Woman in White*.

<sup>10</sup> This usage mirrors *The Woman in White* scholarship (e.g. Cvetkovich, Gaylin, and Kendrick; others mentioning it in passing include Ablow 170; Irvin 229; May 84; Miller 113; Williams 99).

precedes it" (161)—further strengthens the case for the Preamble to be read as paratext; regardless of its title, its role is quintessentially prefatory.

### *Dracula*

The relationship between realism and the fantastic in the prefatory material to *Dracula* present a different—though equally problematic—set of questions to those posed by *The Woman in White*. *Dracula*, unlike many literary works produced in the Victorian era, did not make its first printed appearance in serial form; it was published directly as a novel in 1897. This has a strong influence on the tone of the preface: where Collins wields the preface as a tool against critics who had already read the “novel” in its serialised form, there are no such defensive overtones in the preface to *Dracula*. Or, if the preface is defensive, it is an *anticipatory* defensiveness that works to defuse any scepticism the reader may entertain towards the veracity of the main text:

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day<sup>11</sup> belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the stand-points and within the range of knowledge of those who made them. (6)<sup>12</sup>

In this article, I balance the preface’s forceful claims of truthfulness and realism against its anonymity and its indeterminate positioning amongst *Dracula*’s paratextual material. Further, I suggest that the unresolved tension between these three elements means that the preface can be read simultaneously as a diegetic and non-diegetic narratorial device.

As we have already seen with *The Woman in White*’s Preamble, the position of paratextual material is rarely stable. *Dracula*’s Preface sometimes appears as a distinct paratextual feature, printed on a separate page (Doubleday, Oxford World’s Classics, Penguin Books, Penguin Classics, Heritage Press). In other editions it sits directly below Stoker’s dedication to Homy-Beg (Plume, Broadview Press). It might be printed before the Table of Contents (Doubleday) or after (Oxford World’s Classics, Penguin Books, Penguin Classics, Heritage Press). But proximity to the Table of Contents is an unreliable measure; it too is liable to disappear (Broadview Press, Plume). Pagination for the preface is equally mutable: it might be visible in some editions, suppressed in others (if Chapter One begins on page eight, we can surmise that the Preface has been accorded a nominal, if silent, page number) or absent altogether. Indeed, the only feature common to all editions surveyed in this paper is the lack of title. Faced with the bewildering typographical irregularities enumerated above, this is welcome evidence of editorial consistency across time, space and publishing fashion. Additionally, Genette’s assertion that “an introductory text does not even have to be labelled . . . many a modern preface is distinguished as such only by the use of roman numerals for

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<sup>11</sup> I follow the Penguin, Penguin Classics, Doubleday, Broadview, Plume and Heritage Press editions by using the spelling “later.” The exception is Oxford University Press with “latter.”

<sup>12</sup> An alternate version of *Dracula* was published in Icelandic in 1901 under the title *Makt Myrkranna* (*Powers of Darkeness*). It appears to have been written by Stoker however its provenance and authorship remain unclear (Skal 337-40). It was also accompanied by a preface, albeit significantly longer than the English version and signed with the initials B. S. (Skal 338-39n4). My analysis focusses on the English-language preface.



page numbers” (162) strengthens the legitimacy of using the term “preface” to describe *Dracula*’s introductory text. Parallel to the intricate operations necessary for classifying *The Woman in White*’s Preamble, the very intermittence of *Dracula*’s preface is perhaps the most compelling evidence of its paratextual status.

The content of the preface, though short, also conforms to the typical content of a preface. There is a direct address to the reader and instructions on how to read the novel. The first sentence, “how these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them,” reassures the reader that though they may find the form of the novel unsettling at first, there is a coherent and logical structure underlying the organisation of the novel. The second sentence more actively anticipates the disbelief that the fantastic elements of the novel may produce (“a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief”), but counters this with a reinforcement of the realism of the text. The reader is exhorted to accept this “history” (a word itself implying a realist account) as “simple fact.” The third and final sentence reinforces the story’s realism: “all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them.” Although some have queried the way the vagueness of the last sentence (“exactly contemporary” seems a contradiction in terms, “within the range of knowledge” leaves considerable leeway for make-believe), the overriding impression imparted by the preface is a preoccupation with historical precision and verifiable fact.

The realist pact established in *Dracula*’s preface is signalled by a plain, serious address to the reader, a frank avowal of its stranger aspects and its insistence that the story, despite all doubts, is real. These elements work in concert to ensure that the main text is encountered through a realist lens rather than a fantastic one. This aspiration to objectivity, however, often rubs uncomfortably against a narrative that is composed of subjective accounts. After all, extracts are taken from Jonathan Harker’s journal, Mina Murray’s journal, Lucy Westenra’s diary and Dr Seward’s diary. Though the preface attempts to minimise the subjectivity of these accounts (“there is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err”), it cannot be ignored that the narration is firmly tethered to personal experience. Of course, this alone provides insufficient reason for dismissing the novel’s realism; if anything, it admits that realism is subjective. Our understanding of what is real is always filtered through personal experience. Nonetheless, the most important message the reader takes away from the preface is the objectivity of what is related, not its subjectivity. Carol Senf is instructive on this point: she observes that Stoker is not the only one to overlook the novel’s subjective structure. By the end of the novel “the reader is likely to forget that these documents are subjective records” too (“The Unseen Face” 161-62).

If the preface to *Dracula* actively prepares readers to view the main text as a work of realism, then the effects of this preparation are evident from the first pages of the main text. While there is no direct correspondence between the two (for example, the preface does not name any characters who then appear on the first page of Chapter 1), the style of writing, as well as its content, confirms what was promised in the preface, namely a directly representational view of the world. The story opens with an extract from Jonathan Harker’s journal, detailing his journey to Count Dracula’s castle and the horrifying secrets he finds there. His journal reads somewhat like a travel narrative,<sup>13</sup> particularly the first chapter with its descriptions of the various towns and scenery he passes through. The writing is punctilious, strict in its

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Arata notes that “Stoker maps his story not simply onto the Gothic but also onto a second, equally popular late-Victorian genre, the travel narrative” (626). However, Arata’s primary interest lies not with the reality effects produced by the travel narrative, but its relationship to colonisation.

adherence to times and dates. The first sentence begins “3 May. *Bistritz*.—Left Munich at 8:35 P.M., on 1<sup>st</sup> May, arriving at Vienna early next morning” (7). It is equally assiduous in its noting of historical fact: “in the population of Transylvania there are four distinct nationalities . . .” (8), “at the very beginning of the seventeenth century [*Bistritz*] underwent a siege of three weeks and lost 13,000 people” (9), and so forth.

Yet it would be a mistake to call this scrupulous attention to detail impersonal. The first and second pages of Harker’s journal are peppered with endearing parenthetical reminders to collect recipes for local dishes his wife, Mina, may enjoy. The reassuring reality of the world through which Harker travels continues—and dilates upon—the promise of realism made in the preface. More importantly still, this congruence of text and paratext is as good an assurance as any that readers align themselves with Harker and share his perception of events. Though the story gradually changes from realist to fantastic, marked by *Dracula*’s transmogrification into a bat and Harker’s encounter with the three female vampires, it is clear that realism in both the preface and the main text is fundamental to creating a foundation on which to introduce the more fantastic elements of the text.

Having established that the introductory text’s form and content both perform a prefatory function, the question of authorship needs to be addressed. As the preface is unsigned, it is unclear whether it is written by the author, or by one of the novel’s fictional characters. Genette would describe the latter as a *fictive actorial* preface, one where “the alleged author of a preface may be one of the characters in the action,” and “the person to whom the preface is attributed is fictive” (179). Yet the classificatory system employed by Genette equally admits the possibility that *Dracula*’s anonymous preface is a species of the *authentic authorial* preface, namely a *disavowing* or *crypto-authorial* preface. For Genette, these prefaces occur when the author “denies his authorship not, of course, of the preface itself . . . but of the text it produces” (185). Though the case presented by *Dracula* is in some ways the inverse (by declining to sign the preface, Stoker arguably eschews authorship of it rather than the main text), the preface can nonetheless be viewed as a *disavowing authorial* preface, in that it mobilises many of the conventions associated with the authentic authorial preface whilst resisting a signature.

Scholars tend to ignore the preface’s purposeful anonymity, with some ascribing authorship directly to one of the characters. Alison Case aligns authorship of the preface with Mina, though she refrains from establishing an outright link: in her view, the “opening note” (223) emphasises the “process by which [the story] has been recognized and organized”; this process is “crucial to the plot” (224) and the character who carries out this process is accordingly “a key ‘plotter’” (224). In Case’s view, Stoker places Mina in the role of “key plotter,” hence the inference that Mina is the author of the preface. Others place Harker in the role of the author, often invoking the faulty logic that as the novel’s concluding note is expressly signed “Jonathan Harker,” he must therefore be the author of the preface.<sup>14</sup> Finally, some speculate on multiple possible authors (for Harriet Hustis, this is “an absent presence that can never be completely identified with Mina Harker, Van Helsing or Dr Seward” [20]) but never stray beyond diegetic bounds to include Stoker. Others who refrain from directly naming the author nonetheless position the preface as diegetic rather than non-diegetic. This is often accomplished obliquely: Jennifer Wicke for example describes the preface as “the

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<sup>14</sup> “Jonathan Harker, the character that signs that final note and, therefore, proves to be the fictional editor, introduces the book with the following words . . .” (Jódar 36). “[Harker] ‘takes the mass of typewriting,’ arranges it in mostly chronological order, and presents it to the reader with following prefatory note, unsigned” (Richards 442).

first thing we read as we begin the text” (491). Nur Elmessiri, though referring to the preface as a “prefatory note” (104), firmly places it as a fictional “prefatory note to the [fictional] collection of texts” (104). Senf describes the preface as written by an “anonymous editor” (“The Unseen Face” 161), yet in doing so she also locates the preface within the bounds of fiction, describing it as a “convention” used by Stoker (161). Though the views enumerated above differ slightly from one another, they all represent a similar tendency to categorise *Dracula*’s preface as *fictive actorial* rather than as variant of the *authentic authorial* preface, and, more broadly, assign it a diegetic rather than non-diegetic function.

Contrary to critical opinion, I argue that the question of the preface’s authorship changes as the reading progresses. This is similar to Genette’s evaluation of the paratext as “intermittent” (7). Where Genette’s emphasis is firmly on the way “period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition” (3) shape a paratext and its arrangement amongst the novel’s front matter, *Dracula* demonstrates that as reading progresses, the reader’s perception of the paratext is liable to change. Therefore, when readers first encounter the preface, it is entirely plausible to argue that they read it as—and that it is intended to be—an authorial statement of realism. The realisation that the preface may be a textual document, forming part of Mina’s typewritten notes, only surfaces when the reader is steeped in the narrative. Although none of the critics surveyed reveal how they concluded that the preface is diegetic, the likeliest explanation is that they too eventually realised that the preface forms part of Mina’s typewritten notes. However, instead of acknowledging that its fictionality is not evident from the beginning, critics apply this information retrospectively.

There are several important implications, which could be described as simultaneously diegetic and non-diegetic, for a preface with uncertain authorship. First of all, the preface’s anonymity makes its relationship to the text unclear. If it is an authorial statement, then the preface is clearly delineated from the text. If, on the other hand, the preface is fictional, written by a character within the text, it is much more closely linked to the text; indeed, taking Ralph Pordzik’s view that the introductory text forms the beginning of the novel, the preface can be considered part of the text and not paratextual at all. In this sense, *Dracula*’s preface, like *The Woman in White*’s Preamble, belongs both to the paratext and the text depending on its authorship. Secondly, and most importantly, most scholars overlook the fact that though the reader’s perception of the authorship changes, it remains unsigned from beginning to last, meaning that any attribution of authorship can never be fully substantiated.

Though it may seem intuitively right to arrive at the same conclusion as other scholars (that the preface is part of the novel’s diegesis), the implications of an authorial preface must at least be considered. If this were the case, we would have a situation where Stoker himself attests to the “truth” of the *Dracula* myth, as well as staking a broader claim for the realism of his text. This raises the question of whether a prefatory avowal of realism by the author would influence how we read the text: if it is true that the reader must always negotiate between the knowledge that a text such as *Dracula* is a fiction, and the rather seductive desire to believe that a text is, or could be, real, it is no less true that the reader’s understanding of the text as a fictional construct must ultimately trump this desire. Given the superiority of the knowledge of fictionality, a prefatory, authorial avowal of realism in a fictional text is ultimately not going to cause the reader to read the text as a work of truly realistic non-fiction. Hence, it could look disingenuous for the author to make such a bold claim of realism in the preface. By withholding authorship of the preface, Stoker is able to make a claim for realism whilst simultaneously avoiding allegations of disingenuousness.

The question of whether the preface brokers a realist pact in fantastic fiction opens up far more avenues of enquiry than may be productively addressed by this paper alone. One tempting approach would be to compare the prefatory material across multiple works by the same author. Collins, for example, was a passionate and dedicated *préfacier*. He maintained an ongoing relationship with his reading and reviewing public through a variety of paratextual devices: prefaces, prologues, preambles and notes to the reader. The prefatory strategies he adopts in *The Woman in White* have much in common with those found in *Basil* and *The Moonstone*. Norman Page rightly asserts that Collins's prefaces "collectively constitute a more interesting body of documents than those of most pre-Jamesian novelists" (3), yet their ongoing absence from academic enquiry into Collins's work represents a startling oversight.<sup>15</sup> A broader response to the question posed at the beginning of this paper would encompass prefatory material written by the likes of H. Rider Haggard and Sheridan Le Fanu; two authors who, like Collins and Stoker, began their fantastic stories with realist artefacts and documents. Expansion of the temporal and geographic sweep promises richer possibilities still in understanding how the relationship between realism and the fantastic plays out in paratextual material.

The present study does not pretend to survey the entire field, nor is it intended to be comprehensive. Rather, it prioritises depth over breadth through a close reading of two enduringly popular and well-known examples of fantastic fiction, *The Woman in White* and *Dracula*. This pairing suggests a tantalising starting point for further exploration into the triangular relationship of paratextual material, realism and the fantastic. By bringing these two novels into dialogue with one another, we begin to see how nineteenth-century authors of fantastic fiction exploited the prefatory discourse to specific ends, namely the creation of a realist pact with the reader. As scholars have repeatedly shown, this pact works to ensure the reader's suspension of disbelief when faced with the highly implausible storylines of the fantastic. This paper reveals that paratextual materials are just as essential in introducing "an illusion of verisimilitude" (Pykett, "Sensation and the Fantastic" 206) as the more commonly-consulted main text.

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<sup>15</sup> Lyn Pykett's 2005 study *Wilkie Collins* demonstrates how Collins's prefatory discourse sheds light on his writing and career. Further research could align these insights with theories of the paratext as well as delineating the preface as a distinct set of para/textual documents for analysis.

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