

Resistance from the Margins in George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*

George Elliott Clarke characterizes his 1999 verse drama *Beatrice Chancy* as “a feast of intertexts” (Personal interview).¹ His Acknowledgements catalogue the dramatic, visual, musical, historical, and even architectural texts to which *Beatrice Chancy* responds.² The list is long, testifying to an interpretative love affair with Beatrices in general and, in particular, with Beatrice Cenci, the noblewoman executed in Rome in 1599 for parricide after being raped by her father (Clarke, *Beatrice Chancy* 152-3). Although the notorious Cenci tragedy arguably stands as the primary intertext for Clarke’s work, *Beatrice Chancy* also draws on the plethora of retellings, through sculpture, opera, and drama, which that story prompted, notably Shelley’s 1819 drama *The Cenci*. Moreover, Clarke’s “martyr-liberator” (10) Beatrice amalgamates elements from a host of Beatrices: Dante Alighieri’s divine paragon; Shakespeare’s romantic wit; Thomas Middleton’s manipulator; Dante Rossetti’s devout saint. Clarke combines, adapts, and elaborates on these intertexts, positioning his version of the Cenci story, set in the context of the early nineteenth-century Nova Scotia slave trade, as a conflict between the Black Acadian slave Beatrice and her lustful father/master.

Even as this list of texts signals the intertextual richness of *Beatrice Chancy*, Clarke’s Acknowledgements also foreground the strategic function within the verse drama of what Gérard Genette calls the paratext: the elements located on the peripheries of a text that together provide a guiding framework for a reader. Genette’s coinage of the term draws on J. Hillis Miller’s examination of the prefix “para” as a marker of threshold, a space of blurred boundaries “signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and

difference, interiority and exteriority” (219). The paratext operates as a “vestibule” (Genette, *Seuils* 8), a permeable area that facilitates a reader’s approach to a text.³ This liminal zone exists largely within the text itself, in what Genette dubs the peritext, namely the title, author name, publication information, chapter headings, dedications, epigraphs, preface, introduction, illustrations, afterword, or notes. The paratext also includes elements beyond the physical boundaries of a work that nonetheless influence a reader. This “epitext” includes reviews, interviews with the author, letters, and editorial remarks. These peripheral elements, both peritextual and epitextual, assume a force that Genette likens to the performative impact of speech acts. They can impart information, relay authorial intention and interpretation, or signal a text’s engagement within or against a particular genre. Indeed, Genette depicts the paratext as a “lieu privilégié d’une pragmatique et d’une stratégie, d’une action sur le public au service, bien ou mal compris et accompli, d’un meilleur accueil du texte et d’une lecture plus pertinente” (*Seuils* 8).⁴

Crucial to Genette’s understanding of the paratext is his insistence on its strategic role, a feature epitomized by *Beatrice Chancy*. For example, Clarke entitles the section containing his Acknowledgements “Conviction” and begins it with an epigraph by Chilean writer Antonio Skármeta: “*Las Beatrices producen amores incommensurables.*”⁵ The function of both the section title and its epigraph is complex. On one level, these paratextual elements harken back to the events of the verse drama. The title of the section serves as a reminder of Beatrice’s conviction and hanging; the epigraph recalls the blossoming love between Lead and Beatrice as well as the incestuous passion that Beatrice unwittingly sparks in her father. At the same time, the epigraph points forward to the “*amores incommensurables*” that Beatrice Cenci and Beatrices more generally have prompted in literature and history, the tradition that shapes *Beatrice Chancy*.

The ambiguity of the word “Conviction” in this context is even more problematic. If the word is taken to mean “[d]emonstration, proof” (*Oxford English Dictionary*), then it announces Clarke’s list of historical, artistic, and literary sources as validation for his project. If it is understood as “detection and exposure” (*OED*), then it could set up the catalogue of intertexts as a key to Clarke’s poetic code. “Conviction” can also mean “bringing any one to recognize the truth of what he [*sic*] has not before accepted; convincing” (*OED*), in which case the Acknowledgements become a crucial source of evidence grounding Clarke’s depiction of the horrific reality of slavery in Nova Scotia. Regardless of how the reader interprets this section’s title and epigraph, reading Clarke’s Acknowledgements in isolation from the rest of

the work is not possible. The section occupies a liminal place, both part of and outside of the text, prompting the reader to question the role of the ensuing catalogue of intertexts in shaping *Beatrice Chancy*. In so doing, “Conviction” exemplifies the paratextual strategies that inform the work.

One of the most powerful functions of the paratext is its ability to advise or command a reader to approach a text in a particular way. Genette offers the example of the Preface to Victor Hugo’s *Contemplations*: “Ce livre . . . doit être lu comme on lirait le livre d’un mort” (*Seuils* 16).⁶ Genette characterizes the fringe space of the paratext as a transaction zone that conveys direct authorial commentary or information validated by the author to the reader, thereby guiding the reader closer to the author’s interpretation of the text. Interestingly, the prefix ‘para’ can also mean “to make ready, prepare” or “to ward or defend” (*OED*). The space of the paratext both prepares a reader to enter into and interpret a text and defends that text against readings that clash with authorial and editorial goals. This emphasis on authorial control and strategy becomes particularly important in *Beatrice Chancy*, as Clarke deliberately constructs paratextual elements as framing devices to guide readers’ interpretations of his verse drama.

It could be argued that Genette’s insistence that the primary role of the paratext is to signal authorial intention problematically resurrects the figure of the author. Graham Allen points out that this emphasis on authorial intention helps to “neutralize the radically destabilizing . . . nature of intertextuality” and to “keep transtextual relations within a determinate and determinable field” (107). By extension, however, Genette implies that the paratext remains under the sole control of the text’s author. Rather, the paratext remains particularly vulnerable to outside influence. As editions change, original prefaces might be replaced by updated versions, sometimes after an author’s death. In addition, the media helps to shape the epitext, highlighting certain aspects of an author’s background or of a text at the expense of other, usually less marketable, features. Editors influence the relative impact of a peritext by exerting control over the physical layout of a text. Finally, the influence of the paratext may elude the reader who skips paratextual material, deeming a preface, notes, or acknowledgements to be separate from or even irrelevant to the text. What Genette lauds as the map leading a reader to an author’s intentions appears rather as a surprisingly unstable area, susceptible to alteration, excision, omission, and subjective interpretation.

Indeed, not all readers will interpret authorial signals in identical ways. Genette’s insistence on the paratext’s ability to direct a reader toward the author’s intended interpretation does not mitigate the potentially infinite

range of intertextual relationships that might be triggered by a particular epigraph, dedication, or illustration. Genette is right to point out that a reader who, for example, recognizes the epigraph from Skårmeta that begins the Acknowledgements in *Beatrice Chancy* will glean a different meaning from the text than a reader who does not recognize the intertext. Genette remarks: “Je ne dis pas qu’il faut le savoir: je dis seulement que ceux qui le savent ne lisent pas comme ceux qui l’ignorent” (*Seuils* 13).⁷ If a reader knows that the epigraph is taken from *Ardiente Paciencia*, Skårmeta’s 1985 novel centering on poet and political activist Pablo Neruda who endured a period of exile from Chile for his political views, or knows that Skårmeta himself was temporarily exiled from Chile and used his writing as a form of political resistance, that information will shape his or her interpretation of *Beatrice Chancy*. A reader may bring further unexpected intertexts to bear on a particular paratext on the basis of personal experience; Skårmeta’s quotation, for example, might trigger allusions to Michael Radford’s interpretation of poetry’s revolutionary potential and the relation that develops between Mario and the idealized Beatrice in the 1994 film adaptation of Skårmeta’s novel, *Il Postino*. The paratext’s function is best understood as a primary intertext coexisting with many possible subjective readings; indeed, in his discussion of hypertextuality, Genette recognizes the multiple intertexts that might hover behind a text, whether contributed by author or reader.⁸

Although the paratext’s impact on a reader’s interpretation of a text does not necessarily stem from authorial intent, authorial strategy and control remain integral to the function of the paratext, particularly in the case of *Beatrice Chancy*. *Beatrice Chancy*’s paratext—and especially its peritext—becomes a key tool through which to explore the role of intertextuality in Clarke’s verse drama. The unusual attention which Clarke devotes to peritextual material in *Beatrice Chancy*, and indeed throughout his works, is manifested not only in the abundance of epigraphs, photographs, and stage directions but also through his discussions of his verse drama. So, it is fitting that an article devoted to Clarke’s fascination with peripheral elements should itself rely on an authorial epitext in the form of an interview. Reflecting on *Beatrice Chancy*, Clarke consistently maintains that his poetry is meant to be violent, to jolt readers into memory, awareness, and action. The surfeit of peritextual material in *Beatrice Chancy* is vital; even if a reader does not catch the nuance of every epigraph, their prominence and blatancy forces awareness. Moreover, Clarke deliberately formulates his peritext on both structural and thematic levels to provide intertextual commentary on the events of *Beatrice Chancy*.

Beatrice Chancy is consistently and persuasively framed by and infused with peritext. A sixteenth-century Italian map bookends the work on its front and back inside covers, while the introductory pages are peppered with epigraphs. Clarke prefaces his verse drama with a reflection: “On Slavery in Nova Scotia.” Two more epigraphs, coupled under the heading “Charge,” separate this reflection from the *dramatis personae*. Each of the five acts of the verse drama itself is marked with an epigraph, a title drawn from John Fraser’s *Violence in the Arts* (“Ambivalences,” “Violators,” “Victims,” “Revolt,” and “Responsibility”), and a photograph of a solitary Black woman. A poeticized article from *The Halifax Gazette* immediately follows the conclusion of Act 5, along with another epigraph and an extract of newspaper “Apologies.” Then come Clarke’s Acknowledgements. Clarke goes on to include the performance histories of both the verse drama and its opera version, again prefacing the section with an epigraph. The Colophon positions typesetting credits under a final epigraph, and the work concludes with a brief biography of George Elliott Clarke. Not including stage directions, over 60 elements within the verse drama could be construed as peripheral.

Clarke describes *Beatrice Chancy* as the “maximum of my maximalist aesthetic” (Personal interview). In one sense, the plethora of peritextual material, particularly the number of epigraphs, characterizes Clarke’s maximalist poetic style. However, the peritext of *Beatrice Chancy* plays a strategic role on both structural and thematic levels, positioning the events of the verse drama within a context evoking the resistance of Acadians, slaves, Black women, Black artists, and poetry itself. After briefly considering the structure of the peritext as a whole, this article will examine the function of the peritext in *Beatrice Chancy* through close analysis of two of the work’s most pervasive peritextual elements: the epigraph and the stage direction. Throughout *Beatrice Chancy*, these peritexts reveal a preoccupation with resistance even as they themselves resist generic and linguistic categorization and containment. As such, they consistently mirror and enter into dialogue with the themes and events explored in the drama itself.

Genette posits that the impact of a peritext on a given work stems partly from its position in the narrative. Clarke’s peritext identifies his verse drama as a response to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Nova Scotia travelogues and holiday brochures detailing journeys to sites associated with Longfellow’s poem *Evangeline*. Clarke notes that, as a Nova Scotian, he could not ignore *Evangeline*, which tells the story of two lovers separated when the British deported the French Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755.⁹ The land associated with *Evangeline* became a popular tourist destination, marketed

by Dominion Atlantic Railway and Windsor & Annapolis Railway among others. *Beatrice Chancy* mimics the structure of Dominion Atlantic Railway's travel brochures, guides for genteel travelers as they journeyed by ship from Boston to Yarmouth and then took the train through the Annapolis Valley (Clarke, Personal interview). The frontispiece of such brochures typically included a map of the area around Grand Pré, the site of the Acadians' deportation. The brochures then presented a brief history of the Acadians, a biography of Longfellow, a description of the sights one might see along the journey, with a special focus on the Annapolis Valley, and scheduling and hotel information.¹⁰

The structure of Clarke's introductory peritext, with its map, epigraphs, and brief account of slavery in Nova Scotia, mimics these brochures. At the same time, Clarke's sixteenth-century Italian map of Acadia fuses the intertext of the Cenci tragedy with the commercialization of the Acadian deportation prompted by *Evangeline*.¹¹ Moreover, even as Clarke's reflection on slavery in Nova Scotia continues to mirror the structure of these travel brochures, it foregrounds Clarke's shift in focus from the Acadians' expulsion to slavery; coupled with the dedication to Lydia Jackson and Marie-Josèphe Angélique, two African Canadian slaves noted for their acts of resistance, the structure prepares the reader for his or her own journey into the Annapolis Valley.¹² By figuring these early peritextual elements as a travelogue, complete with map, Clarke ironically literalizes Genette's characterization of the paratext as a guide leading the reader into a text.

Clarke's strategic framework operates in conjunction with the peritext's thematic insistence on acts of oppression and resistance. The epigraphs establish a rich intertextual dialogue between the events of *Beatrice Chancy* and the context out of which each epigraph emerges. The epigraph, according to Genette, can comment on, clarify, or undermine a section or title; it can also provide valuable information about the time period, genre, and biases of a particular work. Frequently, the allusion to a specific political or historical context prompted by the identification of the author of the epigraph plays a more important role than the text of the epigraph itself (*Seuils* 145-8). If one ignores, for the moment, the identities of the authors to whom Clarke refers, the epigraphs still provide important strategic commentary on the events of the verse drama. Indeed, as Genette remarks, in many ways the epigraph remains "un geste muet dont l'interprétation reste à la charge du lecteur" (*Seuils* 145). If a reader does not recognize the name of the author referred to, for example, the impact of the epigraph's intertexts shifts. Regardless of author identity, the epigraphs, positioned throughout the text, function as a thematic map. Clarke juxtaposes his depiction of the development

of Beatrice's agency, the slaves' desperation, Beatrice and Lead's decision to kill Chancy, and the "violence" ("Embracing" 19) of his poetry with the epigraphs' consistent emphasis on the role of women in countering acts of oppression, contemporary manifestations of slavery, the ethical quagmire that surrounds the decision to kill an oppressor, and art's role in resisting tyranny.

The epigraphs instruct and even order the reader to approach the text with these themes in mind. Clarke positions two of the epigraphs that precede Act 1 under the performative title "Charge," a word that, mirroring the ambiguity of the Acknowledgements' "Conviction," brings with it paradoxical connotations of command, duty, attack, and accusation. The two epigraphs included in the section, emphasizing women's duty to abolish slavery and women's right to defend themselves from a rostrum rather than from a scaffold, reinforce all of these connotations (*Beatrice Chancy* 9).¹³ At the same time, Clarke structures these epigraphs as thematic directives to the reader. Positioned amongst and already in dialogue with four other introductory epigraphs that range from a testimony to the power of beauty to a meditation on modern slavery manifested in "bondage to . . . financial institutions" (11), this charge implicitly extends to the epigraphs throughout *Beatrice Chancy*. The lyrics of the spiritual "Lonesome valley" (67) hover over both Beatrice's rape and Lustra's "invisible, silent . . . chains" (74) in Act 3; Trudeau's famous "Faut-il assassiner le tyran?" (123) problematizes Beatrice's parricide in Act 5 as well as the slaves' debates throughout the verse drama concerning the proper means of resisting their master.

Along with a map, Clarke bookends the verse drama with important reminders of the prevalence of slavery in contemporary society: "And if the African belief is true, then somewhere here with us, in the very air we breathe, all that whipping and chaining and raping and starving and branding and maiming and castrating and lynching and murdering—all of it—is still going on" (158). This concluding epigraph appears under the heading "Colophon," assuming the function of a thematic authorial imprint. Perhaps the overriding charge to the reader, shared by all of the epigraphs and reinforced by the allusions to the manifold guises of slavery, is an injunction to remember history. Clarke himself posits that *Beatrice Chancy* was meant to "jet blood and saliva in amnesiacs' faces" ("Embracing" 16). The sheer excess of Clarke's paratext underscores the implicit violence of that injunction.

The identities of the epigraphs' authors only add to this intertextual dialogue. Clarke includes the words of Maryse Condé, a Black Caribbean writer, storyteller, and activist whose works deal extensively with slavery and racism; George Bourne, an American abolitionist who warned against the moral

danger of slavery; Ann Plato, a nineteenth-century American educator who was the second Black woman to have her writing published in the United States; Hardial Bains, the Indian-born former head of the Canadian Communist party; Carrie Best, activist, journalist, and writer who founded the first newspaper for Blacks in Nova Scotia; Angela Carter, a novelist and feminist fascinated with intertextuality and intertextual theorists, particularly Genette; Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, whose manifesto evinces the futurist demand for a cultural uprising against tradition and custom. The authors of the epigraphs span centuries, languages, countries, and genres, opening up a dynamic interrelation among *Beatrice Chancy* and the history of slavery, the history of Nova Scotia, the history of Black women writers and activists, and the struggle against constraining customs that continues to be waged on political and artistic levels.

The epigraphs retain a focus on the revolutionary and defiant potential of art and artists, consistently reinforcing the artist's role in resisting tyranny. Marinetti, for instance, insists that beauty manifests itself in struggle, while the words of African American spirituals conjure up the history of hope and resistance that coexists with that of slavery's oppression. Similarly, Clarke's inclusion of the words of contemporary novelists, writers, and storytellers testifies to the continued political role of the writer and poet. Most important, Clarke marks his own poetry as a form of resistance. In a recent article, Clarke writes that poetry and, indeed, beauty in any form, functions as a form of justice ("Embracing" 24). The potency and agency of poetry, Clarke argues, stem from anger, ugliness, and violence: "My poetry must come from anger / Or nothing from it comes" (21). While the poetry of "the howl [and] the lament" (17) that characterizes *Beatrice Chancy* exemplifies this aesthetic, Clarke also inscribes himself into two of his epigraphs, discreetly joining the ranks of the abolitionists, writers, politicians, and activists whose words he invokes.

The first epigraphs in *Beatrice Chancy*, hidden at the bottom of the publication and copyright information on the title page's verso, are Clarke's own. Clarke playfully structures his disclaimer as two poetic epigraphs:¹⁴

Blessèd reader
 Every line is true, or it is a lie:
 Honey poured – honest – over lye.
 Ogni riferimento a fatti e persone è del tutto casuale e le vicende,
 Personaggi ed i loro nomi sono immaginari.¹⁵ (4)

By figuring these disclaimers, one conventional and one unconventional, as epigraphs, Clarke implicitly links them with the copious epigraphs

interspersed throughout the text that testify to histories of oppression and resistance. Moreover, like the “Charge,” Clarke presents the epigraphs as a direct address to the reader, appropriating the nineteenth-century appeal “*Blessèd reader*.” The epigraphs mark Clarke’s own poetry as a form of resistance, and problematize the way in which a reader should respond to *Beatrice Chancy* and its peritext. Surrounded by publication information that the reader usually skips en route to the main text, these epigraphs are not likely to be noticed by most readers. Moreover, even if they are noticed, the disclaimers are themselves ambiguous. The second epigraph is in Italian, which the average reader will not be able to read, thereby masking the story’s fictional roots. Similarly, the first epigraph remains unwilling to commit to truth or fiction: “Every line is true, or it is a lie.” The epigraphs occupy a liminal position between history and truth that echoes their physical position in relation to the verse drama. Warning readers of the danger of ignoring even the most seemingly irrelevant paratextual material, the epigraphs anticipate the strategic import of extra-textual material throughout the work. At the same time, they introduce Clarke’s poetry as wielding historical and political consequences that are unmitigated, perhaps even intensified, by its imaginary roots.

The epigraph attributed to Junius, inserted within the excerpt from the *Halifax Gazette* at the conclusion of the verse drama, is similar. This time, instead of concealing the epigraph within copyright details, Clarke appropriates a fictitious name. The true identity of Junius, the pseudonym of an eighteenth-century English writer noted for his consistent refusal to submit to arbitrary measures of authority, remains unknown. This epigraph, which parodies the Toronto *Globe and Mail*’s daily quotation from Junius, is in fact Clarke’s own poetry: “Noises of panting, running, muskets, creaking hounds, snarling wheels, sagging wind, moon screaming in the trees, the Gaspereau River groaning” (151). In linking his words with those of Junius, Clarke positions his own poetry as a public and lasting voice with the power to challenge oppressive authority. Moreover, by introducing the epigraph into a newspaper excerpt that is itself poeticized, Clarke validates poetry as a medium for transmitting and defining news and history. The decision further problematizes the tenuous relation between truth and fiction introduced by the initial epigraphs, while also underscoring the defiant potency of poetry as a genre.

This partly fictionalized selection from the *Halifax Gazette*, like the hidden epigraphs, explicitly merges Clarke’s poetry, the text, with peritext, foregrounding the question of where text ends and peritext begins. Genette’s

definition of the peritext emphasizes the difficulties of determining where the boundaries between text and peritext lie: “on ne sait pas toujours si l’on doit ou non considérer qu’elles lui appartiennent, mais [elles] en tout cas l’entourent et le prolongent” (*Seuils* 7).¹⁶ The problem of differentiating between text and peritext becomes especially difficult in *Beatrice Chancy*, complicated not only by Clarke’s explicit injection of poetry into seemingly peritextual material but by the question of performance.¹⁷ As a verse drama, the work lies on the border between poetry and drama. What becomes of the peritext in performance? If it simply disappears, how does that omission affect audience response? If peritextual elements such as the epigraphs and the map are included in a theatre program, does the spectator understand those texts interacting in the same way that the reader does? What peritextual elements need to be included in performance in order for an audience to appreciate some of the subtleties available to a reader? If included, do those elements then become part of the text? These questions are further complicated by the reality that any performance functions as an interpretation of a text, drawing out through costume, set design, blocking, and casting certain intertexts at the expense of others.¹⁸ Despite the directorial challenges presented by such realities of collaborative performance, *Beatrice Chancy*’s refusal to adhere to generic limits and the resultant shifting boundary between text and peritext function strategically as large-scale enactments of art’s resistant potential.

The poetic stage directions in *Beatrice Chancy* stand as a prime example. Genette does not include stage directions as an example of a peritext in *Seuils*, perhaps because they arguably function as integral to a printed dramatic text. Because dramatic texts are performance-based, however, stage directions generally assume a peritextual function, providing crucial guidance and commentary on characterization and setting. At the same time, they remain vulnerable to the omission and alteration characteristic of the peritext. Most audiences do not have access to stage directions. Moreover, a director retains the right to alter characterization and staging depending on his or her interpretation. Stage directions therefore become unstable elements operating at the border of a text, exemplifying the features of the peritext.¹⁹

Because Clarke’s stage directions cross the line between the dramatic and the poetic, the boundaries between dramatic peritext and primary text remain continually blurred. Clarke’s stage directions sometimes work to convey onstage action. Immediately following Beatrice’s rape, for example, the stage directions simply establish the scene’s location and announce Beatrice’s arrival onstage: “*Lustra’s chambers. Beatrice enters, staggering,*

bedraggled. Lustra shadows her" (90). In the majority of cases, however, Clarke's stage directions are crucial to his poetry and the verse drama's thematic content, providing subtle commentary on the atmosphere of a scene even as they continue to implicate the reader or audience in writing stories of oppression.²⁰ In Act 4, scene 1 for instance, Clarke intensifies the impact of Beatrice's rape through stage directions: "A violin mopes. Invisible shovelfuls of dirt thud upon the scene—as if those present were being buried alive—like ourselves" (91). The highly sensory peritext, which continually features sound, sight, and smell, paradoxically does so in directives impossible to stage: "A damp, mushroom odour of shame, a whiff of disease, prowls among the flowers" (33). The force of the scent of shame, or of Peacock "stink[ing] secretly of spit" (24) lies in the language, not in staging.²¹

Clarke never intended his stage directions to be taken literally. He describes them as "gestures toward a kind of feeling" meant to be "enjoyed in terms of [their] poeticity" (Personal interview). Significantly, his description explicitly recalls Genette's peritext. He wrote them to be "a hint" or "a guide" (Personal interview) for a reader or a director, an atmospheric map that would shape interpretation of the larger work. However, in performance, the director ultimately determines how those directions are used. If they are omitted or ignored, *Beatrice Chancy* loses some of its most potent poetry. If a staging excises the harsh onomatopoeic quality of the directions surrounding Beatrice's whipping, for instance, much of the sharpness of the scene disappears: "Moonlight grates upon the graveyard. The wind is staggered by the sounds of the whip—and worse—then resumes. The thin, biting tone of E-flat clarinet insinuates bitter silences" (70).²² Excluding the stage directions also deprives the work of the intertextual impact of such stage directions as, "Beatrice remembers Jeremiah 8:21" (119) and the critiques directed to reader or spectator concealed within the stage directions: "Too many of us destroy ourselves" (15); "Slavery is global industry and trade—the future" (25); "There's no freedom this side of the grave" (95). Indeed, recalling the language of the epigraphs, the stage directions play a crucial role in negotiating the relation between fiction and truth, history and the present.

The 1997 staged reading of *Beatrice Chancy*, directed by Colin Taylor, opted for a compromise.²³ Taylor omitted the stage directions that seemed limited to the action of the drama and included a narrator in the cast who would read the directions that, in Clarke's words, "added to the texture" (Personal interview). That compromise still poses the question of how to determine which directions constitute action and which texture. However, it testifies to the extent to which Clarke's poetry resists confinement within peritextual or generic limits. Clarke muses that a successful staging of the

play would require Shakespearean actors “who could . . . carry the language” (Personal interview). The poetry of the verse drama must remain a priority in performance, a feature that blurs conventional distinctions between text and peritext, poem and play.

This linguistic and generic resistance mirrors the force of the poetry wielded by Clarke’s enslaved protagonists. Ironically, it is Chancy who likens the resistance of his slaves to the defiance promised by poets: “Our world’s infected by slaves and poets!” (27). Indeed, the slaves on the Paradise plantation continually invoke poetry as a means to freedom. Dumas likens Beatrice’s courageous actions to “Seven millennia of poetry” (146) while Beatrice herself, eyeing the gallows, maintains that, “I find it hard to breathe / Outside of poetry” (142). Moses points to poetry’s ability to wound (121). Clarke identifies Dumas, the revolutionary seer, as a poet. Even George, the escaped slave who is the subject of the *Halifax Gazette’s* Reward column, “fancies himself a poet” (150). Their poetry is far from innocent, exemplifying Maureen Moynagh’s contention that Clarke “makes poetry the means of rending the veil of decorum historically dropped over the most violent and gruesome acts of slavery” (114). In Act 4, scene 5, for example, Lustra recoils when Beatrice describes her father as her “raper”: “These words aren’t poetry, Beatrice; they canker” (109). Throughout *Beatrice Chancy*, poetry, and Clarke’s poetry in particular, embeds a language of anger, struggle, and revolution.²⁴ It offers freedom and condemns rape. It overflows the limits of the text to merge with the peritextual words of abolitionists and politicians and newspapers. It refuses generic categorization and demands to be performed. At the beginning of Act 2, scene 2, Francis Chancy unwittingly points to the political potency of poetry that Clarke inscribes in both text and peritext: “Plays spawn treason, / Poems assassination” (49). The words echo Clarke’s insistence that his words, springing from anger, “promise only murders [and] executions” (“Embracing” 21). The tyrant, it seems, is right to fear the poet.

Clarke’s peritext guides the reader into a narrative of struggle that remains continually framed by and in dialogue with peritextual elements testifying to oppression and the work of those who choose to fight it. Moreover, even as *Beatrice Chancy’s* peritext enjoins the reader not to forget this history, it itself resists categorization. Clarke enacts poetry’s resistant potential on a textual level even as he depicts Beatrice’s acts of resistance through and as poetry. Fittingly, the peritext, verbal and visual elements lying on the physical margins of a work, plays a pivotal role in the intertextual strategies of *Beatrice Chancy*, a verse drama that centres on the resistance of people at the margins.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Linda Hutcheon and the anonymous peer readers at *Canadian Literature* who offered valuable suggestions and comments on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to George Elliott Clarke and James Rolfe for the opportunity to interview them; this article is indebted to insights that emerged during those discussions.
- 2 The list is by no means exhaustive. Clarke's work draws on intertexts ranging from Titian's *Venus d'Urbino* to the Bible to aphorisms. For a judicious account of the influences pervading *Beatrice Chancy*, see Clarke, "Embracing" 15-24.
- 3 *Seuils* provides a comprehensive overview of Genette's theory of paratextuality. See also Allen 97-115; Maclean 273-80; and Hallyn and Jacques 202-15.
- 4 A privileged space of pragmatics and of a strategy, of an action on the public in the service, whether successfully or badly understood and accomplished, of a better reception of the text and of a more pertinent reading (My translation.).
- 5 Beatrices trigger incommensurable loves (My translation.).
- 6 This book must be read like one would read the book of a dead person (My translation.).
- 7 I'm not saying that one must know it [the intertext]: I'm only saying that those who do know it will not read like those who don't (My translation.).
- 8 Genette divides the ways in which texts can enter into relation with others (what he calls transtextuality) into five categories: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hyper-textuality, and architextuality. For helpful overviews of these terms and the specific inter-textual relationships that each alludes to, see Genette, *Palimpsests* 1-10 and Allen 101-15.
- 9 For judicious accounts of the history of the French Acadians and of the Acadian deportation, see Arsenault, Cazaux, N.E.S. Griffiths, and Naomi Griffiths.
- 10 For examples of these brochures, see Douglas; *Holiday Tours Through Evangeline's Land*; *The Land of Evangeline*; *Old Acadia In Nova Scotia*; and *Through the Land of Evangeline*.
- 11 Interestingly, editions of Longfellow's poem also often included a map of "Evangeline country."
- 12 Lydia Jackson, having arrived in Nova Scotia along with the eighteenth-century influx of Black Loyalists, was indentured and eventually impregnated by her master, Dr. Bulman. She finally fled to Sierra Leone with other Black Loyalists in 1792. Marie-Josèphe Angélique was the slave of a wealthy Montreal tradesman. On 17 April, 1734, hearing she was going to be sold, Angélique escaped, setting fire to her owner's house to distract her pursuers. In June 1734 she was captured, tortured, and hanged.
- 13 The two epigraphs are: "The abolition of slavery ... is emphatically the duty and privilege of women" (Bourne) and "La femme a le droit de monter sur l'échafaud; elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la tribune" (Gouges). Women have the right to ascend the scaffold; they must equally have the right to ascend the [court] rostrum (My translation.).
- 14 Clarke draws on a range of languages in his epigraphs and throughout *Beatrice Chancy*. His extensive use of French, Spanish, Italian, and Latin functions partly to reinforce the particular context of slavery in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia that grounds *Beatrice Chancy*. The slaveowners of Nova Scotia were landed gentry, well-educated and well-read individuals who established universities and libraries in Nova Scotia. Library records from the 1890s reveal a preponderance of multilingual book collections. The multilingual poetry of *Beatrice Chancy* invokes this history (Clarke, Personal interview).

- 15 Every reference to facts and persons is totally casual, and the events, people, and their names are imaginary (My translation.).
- 16 We do not always know whether or not we must consider the paratextual elements as belonging to the text, but in any case they surround the text and extend it (My translation.).
- 17 Interestingly, the page numbers of *Beatrice Chancy* do not demarcate peritext and text by, for example, enumerating title page and publication information with lower case Roman numerals and marking the beginning of the verse drama with Arabic numerals. Page numbers are listed using Arabic numerals beginning with the first title page. In a way, therefore, Clarke signals that every page constitutes part of the text.
- 18 See Carlson 111-17.
- 19 The *dramatis personae* and the description of the setting assume similar roles in *Beatrice Chancy*. However, both of these elements would normally be included in a program and would therefore be available to an audience.
- 20 Maureen Moynagh points out that Clarke's stage directions even scan as poetry and goes on to argue that such peritextual features suggest that *Beatrice Chancy* should be read as poetry rather than as theatre (101).
- 21 Clarke's epigraph attributed to Junius shares these sensory qualities, implicitly connecting the stage directions to the epigraphs.
- 22 A large number of Clarke's stage directions centre on sound, particularly musical, imagery. Such references as "*African-tuned bagpipes*" (134) and "*F-minor music – note of immorality*" (82) abound. Significantly, the verse drama of *Beatrice Chancy* developed as an offshoot of George Elliott Clarke's collaboration with composer James Rolfe on the opera version of *Beatrice Chancy*. While neither Rolfe nor Clarke considers the music of *Beatrice Chancy* as exercising detailed influence on the stage directions of the verse drama or vice versa, both artists maintain that there was inevitable "cross-fertilization" between the two projects on both linguistic and musical levels (Clarke, Personal interview). Rolfe credits Clarke's poetic stage directions with providing the "atmosphere" for much of his music, going on to argue that music assumes the role of the verse drama's stage directions in the opera (Rolfe, Telephone interview).
- While the vast majority of the peritextual material that pervades the verse drama is excised from the opera score and libretto, a few elements remain. Rolfe retains three of Clarke's musically descriptive stage directions in the libretto: "*A bell shivers the dusk*"; "*A violet bell bleeds in the white wind*"; and "*Slaves, sunflowers, stars, sparks*." Moreover, Rolfe prefaces his score with a "Charge" to the listener consisting of the same epigraph by Hardial Bains that introduces Act 1 of the verse drama. Finally, the section entitled "Conviction" appears in nearly identical form at the conclusion of both verse drama and libretto. The libretto also includes a variation on the verse drama's "Charge" as well as the performance history of the opera. Even in the highly edited medium of a libretto, *Beatrice Chancy* continues to be informed by peritextual elements. For a summary of the development of the two projects, see Clarke, "Embracing" 15-17.
- 23 The verse drama was staged as a reading with minimal blocking on July 10 and 11, 1997 at the Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. It played to an audience of approximately eighty people over the two nights and received "reasonable acclaim" (Clarke, Personal interview). Unfortunately, the verse drama has not been performed since. For a detailed performance history of both verse drama and opera versions of *Beatrice Chancy*, see Clarke, *Beatrice Chancy* 155-7.
- 24 See also Clarke, "Embracing" 19-21.

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