

THE
GEN
BOOK

Reading The Gen Book and Transtextuality – a Metatext

This commentary explains transtextuality and how it operates in the piece on the following page. If you, the reader, want to create your own relationships among and between the texts in this transtextual relationship, skip this metatext. If you want to understand the relationships which the author of the Ode sought to express, continue to read now or come back later.

Genette's notion of transtextuality¹ foregrounds the inter-relationships among and between texts, highlighting the complexity in these relationships, showing the different hands contributing to this complexity and indicating that there is no pre-determined starting point. A representation of transtextual relationships is necessarily challenging. There should be no linear reading, no hierarchy of text, although there should be a focal point.

The focal point is Ode to the Gen Book. Unlike the subject of Neruda's Odes, the subject of the ode will be unfamiliar to most readers and thus it needs to be represented. The high resolution image, which shows the grain of the binding and the worn edges of the spine, conveys the physicality of the book and something of its strength. The book is a hypotext to the Ode, that text without which the ode could not exist. The forcefulness of the image, however, poses a problem of readability when it is presented literally as hypotext, the text under the text. That is solved here by presenting the image in its own right and then using a watermark version under the text.

This work uses Word 2010. Software intended for online design may have produced a more sophisticated online result, but the Gen Book and its story is one of achieving significant results in less than optimal circumstances. Thus the limitations of Word are part of the document.

The page which presents the Ode is based on three columns, with the central column containing the Ode to the Gen Book. This uses Calibri, 11 pt, a default Word 2010 font. The heading is in black, but the stanzas are in contrasting colours to convey the movement inherent in the classical Pindaric odes, from East to West, West to East and the mingling of the two at centre stage. The column to the left uses Calibri 10pt in a textbox for architext, indicating the constraints of genre. The column to the right uses Calibri 9pt without and without textboxes for the hypotexts and hypertexts. The catalogue record is clearly a constrained document, sitting within its text box. The award 'certificate' is a text in its own right extending beyond the edges of the paper in its relationship to the Gen Book and its significance, but the transcription of the content is similarly constrained by convention. The hyperlink could exist only in the last stanza of the Ode, and still be evidence of a second hypotext, but placement in the textbox emphasises it and its different relationship to the Ode to the Gen Book. The final text box contrasts the book in this ode to the book in Pablo Neruda's Oda al Libro. The title of the piece presented in the *Proceedings of the Document Academy* is represented as marginalia, which the current reader may have noted and read or may have ignored.

The technology of a screen reader may struggle to represent the relationships expressed in this document. Transtextuality is not based on linear relationships and some of the complexities of this set of relationships may elude the reader using a screen reader in the same way that, as the Ode itself suggests, the Gen Book was a witness to events that have not been told in the 'West', and that the 'West' can never fully know.

¹ Genette, G. 1997, *Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Architext

This is an ode in Pindaric form. The three stanzas follow the movements of the Greek chorus from East to West, from West to East and finally centred, bringing voices from the drama together. The first stanza is in praise of the object, the second stanza a melancholy reflection and the third a resolution of the tensions (or not).

The ode is written in trochaic meter, /-, rather than the more usual iambic meter, -/. Trochaic meter gives a more halting reticence to the words.

Ode to The Gen Book

**Sturdy book here
trusted source then
formal title
playful nickname
Buckram worn and
stained with water
Inkrun red stamp
shows permission
Leaves exuding
scent of jungle.
You were
prized, award, lifesaving,
education greatly valued.**

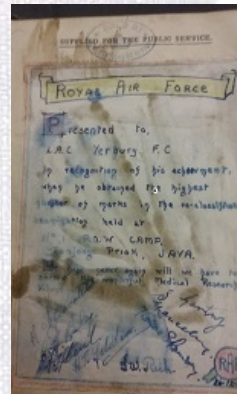
**Stark reminder
of the wartime
now beside the
novels standing
Witness to
encampment suffering,
lives unbalanced,
captive, silent.**

**Merely tell the
treasured learning
flyleaf friendships
landscape beauty.
My account
his account
NOT written, haven't done
Don't know even now
Best forget
Know the truth, not
guess at answers**

Hypertexts/hypotexts

Author: Not known
Title: [cover title] The Gen Book
[spine title] How to become an LAC
[title page title covered by award
certificate] ?Manual of instruction for
the Royal Naval sick berth staff.
Publisher: London, His Majesty's
Stationery Office, 1930.

Award



Royal Air Force
Presented to L.A.C. Yerbury, F.C. in
recognition of his achievement when
he obtained the highest number of
marks in the reclassification
examination held at No.1 P.O.W CAMP,
Tanjong Priok, Java.
We hope never again will we have to
borrow this wonderful Medical
Research Volume.
Various signatures, Dated: 26.12.1942

<http://www.captivememories.org.uk/fepow-profiles/yerbury-franklin/>

The book in Neruda's *Oda al libro* is *hermoso*, beautiful, but this government-issue book was never beautiful, it was a handbook, with paper and binding made to last. Neruda comments on the smell of the paper and he also makes a play on the leaves of the book, *hojas*, referring to the book as a tiny grove, *minimo bosque*. Here, the leaves of the book are linked to the jungles of Java and Sumatra.