

The Anti-Mimetic Function of Paratext in Wilkie Collins's Framed Narrative *After Dark*

Wilkie Collins'in *After Dark* Adlı Çerçevesi Anlatısında
Yanmetnin Anti-Mimetik İşlevi

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Abstract

The use of mimetic and diegetic modes of storytelling has significant implications for the meaning and interpretation of Wilkie Collins's (1824-1889) short story collection *After Dark* (1856). By using a framed narrative structure, Collins highlights the mimetic features of the stories in his collection. He creates a semi-factual atmosphere through dividing the story universe into two levels. On the first level, the discourse of the primary narrator and his wife emphasizes the mimetic nature of the six realistic stories recounted on the second level. Through following such a structure, the author seeks to create the illusion that the stories in the collection are biographical accounts. Verisimilitude, or lifelikeness, is therefore presented as the primary narrative property in *After Dark*. However, as this article mainly argues, the authorial discourse presented in Collins's general preface to the collection—which, to use Gerard Genette's term, is a paratext or threshold—dismantles the characters' realistic pretensions on the two levels of the storyworld. More precisely, by calling the six narrated stories in the collection the offspring of his own imagination, Collins's paratextual preface destroys the highlighted mimetic claims on the two levels in the storyworld.

Keywords: mimetic storytelling, verisimilitude, framed narrative, paratext, Collins, *After Dark*

Öz

Mimetik ve diegetik hikaye anlatımı modlarının kullanılması, Wilkie Collins'in (1824-1889) kısa öykü koleksiyonu *After Dark*'ın (1856) anlamı ve yorumu için önemli çıkarımlara sahiptir. Çerçevesi bir anlatı yapısı kullanarak, Collins derlemesindeki mimetik özelliği vurgulamaktadır. Collins hikaye evrenini iki seviyeye bölerek yarı gerçekçi bir atmosfer yaratmaktadır. Birinci düzeyde, birincil anlatıcı ve eşinin söylemi, ikinci düzeyde anlatılan altı gerçekçi hikâyenin mimetik doğasını vurgulamaktadır. Böyle bir yapıyı ygyluyarak, yazar koleksiyondaki öykülerin biyografik anlatımlar olduğu yanılması yaratmaya çalışıyor. Bu nedenle gerçeğe benzerlik veya gerçekçilik, *After Dark*'ta birincil anlatı özelliği olarak sunulur. Ancak, bu makalede esas olarak tartışıldığı üzere, Collins'in ana metine eşlik eden ve Gerard Genette'in tabiriyle yanmetin olarak adlandırılan derlemenin genel önsözünde sunduğu yazar söylemi, karakterlerin hikâye dünyasının iki düzeyine ilişkin gerçekçi iddialarını ortadan kaldırmaktadır.

Daha doğrusu, Collins'in yan metinsel önsözü, koleksiyonda anlatılan altı öyküyü kendi hayal gücünün ürünü olarak adlandırarak, öykü dünyasının iki düzeyine ilişkin vurgulanan mimetik iddiaları yok ediyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: mimetik hikaye anlatımı, gerçeğe benzerlik, çerçevesi anlatı, yan metin, Wilkie Collins, *After Dark*

Introduction

The nineteenth century British novelist and playwright Wilkie Collins's (1821-1889) contributions to the development of the mystery, sensation, and gothic genres, as predominantly exemplified in his novels *The Woman in White* (1859), *The Moonstone*

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(1868) and *No Name* (1862), have earned him a place among the most important writers of the Victorian era. Collins's "popularity as a compelling storyteller," in Jenny Bourne Taylor's words, "has remained undiminished" in a way that "in general studies of Victorian literature and culture Collins is regarded as a serious writer as much as a popular novelist" (2006, pp. 1-2). Although the "interest in his work," according to William Baker (2013), "is undergoing its most fertile period ever," in Collins's own time there was a conflicting critical approach towards his storytelling practices. For example, Lyn Pykett highlights the incompatible attitudes towards Collins's works by stating that, "on the question of Collins's merits as a storyteller, the critical refrain remained substantially the same in the closing decades as it had been in the first decades of his career: he was by turns praised for his skill in storytelling and plotting, and blamed for being a mere or mechanical plotter" (p. 110). However, as Pykett emphasises, reviewers generally "commented favourably on his storytelling ability" (p. 191).

Collins's skilfulness in creating and developing complex characters and intricate plots is also evident in his first short story collection *After Dark*. Published in 1856, his collection includes six short stories. Five of these were previously published in *Household Words*, a magazine edited by Charles Dickens. According to Algernon Charles Swinburne, *After Dark*: "is one of the most delightful books he has left us: each of the stories in it is a little model, a little masterpiece in its kind" (p. 270). Above all, Collins's collection of short stories displays his mastery of storytelling.

Storytelling is the primary subject and goal of narration in *After Dark*. Collins uses storytelling as a medium for transforming the desperate situation within the first level in the storyworld. This feature, according to Anthea Trodd (2006), is a shared quality in Collins's early writing: "Collins's storytelling often recreates the context of boredom within the story, boredom induced by restriction of mobility, vision, or possibilities for diversion, which slowly builds, through intense attentiveness to a limited range of objects, into fear and suspense" (p. 33). The art of storytelling in *After Dark*, however, is mostly presented as a recreational power that can transform a desperate family's circumstances. In other words, storytelling functions as both an emancipatory force and a narrative device to alleviate boredom.

Collins constructs a unified narrative whole in *After Dark* by drawing on the universal tradition of frame structure. This narrative technique allows Collins to imbue the storyworld with a realistic atmosphere. "Framed narratives," according to Bernard Duyfhuizen (2005), "occur in narrative situations when events are narrated by a character other than the primary narrator or when a character tells a tale that, although unrelated to the main story, contains a moral message for the listener in the text" (p. 188). Collins weaves together the six seemingly unrelated stories in *After Dark* by employing a frame narrative structure. The stories are embedded within the narrative of the narrator and his wife. Additionally, Collins incorporates a preface to the collection. As a result, *After Dark* includes two distinct sections: the authorial section and the narrative section or the section of the narrators and characters. While the author's preface provides an introduction to the collection, the narrator's six prologues, epilogue, and his wife's diary serve to introduce the six internal stories. In relating the stories to us from his memory, the narrator recedes into the background to leave us alone with the character-narrators within the six fictional worlds.

The storyworld in *After Dark* is, thus, structured on two levels. The first level is where the primary narrator and his wife reside. The six stories in the collection are set on the second or internal level, which is the world of the narrators-characters. The primary narrator builds up a unified storyworld out of six apparently disconnected single tales—the

traveller's story of a terribly strange bed, the lawyer's story of a stolen letter, the French governess's story of Sister Rose, the angler's story of the lady of Glenwith Grange, the nun's story of Gabriel's marriage, and the professor's story of the yellow mask. Collins constructs a fictional whole through applying a framed narrative structure, and utilising a portrait-painter as a mediating element of the six different tales. The collection begins with the author's preface. After that, the narrator's wife's biographical account of the construction of the collection is presented under the title "Leaves from Leah's Diary." Then, the six stories are presented, each preceded by a short prologue by the narrator. The collection ends with the last pages of the narrator's wife's diary.

As this paper maintains, *After Dark* exhibits a fundamental tension between the mimetic and diegetic aspects of discourse. As two contrasting poetic modes or ways of presenting a story, diegesis and mimesis were firstly introduced by Plato in *Republic*. As for narratologist Gerald Prince's definition, diegesis refers to: "1. The (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur. 2. Telling, recounting as opposed to showing, enacting [mimesis]" (2003, p. 20). While in mimesis (imitation) the poet (or storyteller) pretends to be someone else, in diegesis (narration) they speak in their own names by using narratorial mediation (Prince, 2003, pp. 52-53). In Dan Shen's (2005) words, "as two contrasting ways of narrating the speeches of the characters [...] mimesis is dramatic imitation, and diegesis is indirect presentation" (p. 107).

The mimesis/diegesis complex lies at the heart of narrative in *After Dark*. While the author pretends to be speaking through his characters in the storyworlds, his emphasis on the artistic and creative aspects of his work in his preface to the collection discredits the primary narrator's, his wife's, and the character-narrators' mimetic claims. In other words, as it is mainly argued in this paper, Wilkie Collins's anti-mimetic paratext undermines the diegetic aspect of his narrative in *After Dark*.

Collins presents *After Dark* with a preface in which he discusses the creative process behind the stories in the collection. Although it is not an integral part of the text, his forward deconstructs the pretended narratorial discourse on the verisimilitude aspect of the presented tales in the diegetic level. In his study on the relationship between textual and metatextual elements in a single published literary text, the French narratologist Gerard Genette highlights the guiding role of preliminary elements, such as authorial prefaces, in communicating the narrative meaning and designating how a single narrative should be read. Dedications, prefaces, notes, glosses, intercalations, and misplaced chapter headings, according to Genette (1997), are "paratextual elements" or "liminal devices" that "interrupt the conventional diegetic progress of the narrative" (p. xii). Through these elements, as Genette highlights, authors "*present*" or "*make present*" their texts (1997, p. 1, emphasis in original). The paratext belongs neither to the text nor to the space outside it. Rather, it is a "*threshold ... an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)*" (Genette, 1997, p. 1, emphasis in original). By paratext, as an accompaniment of the text, "a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public. (Genette, 1991, p. 261). Thus, the "chief function" of an authorial preface, as Genette (1997) argues, is "*to ensure that the text is read properly*" (p. 197, emphasis in original). Therefore, along with its "authorial" and "original" aspects, a preface acts as a "monitory (this is *why* and this is *how* you should read this book)" (Genette, 1997, p. 197, emphasis in original).

As Louise Brix Jacobsen (2022) contends, "following Gérard Genette's seminal work [*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987)], paratexts have been regarded as essential parts of the communication between authors and readers of literature" (p. 141) since "it is

common for authors to use the liminal space of the paratext to guide and play with the reader's assumptions about the text" (p. 142). Similarly, Collins uses the paratext of *After Dark* as a medium of communication with the implied reader. In the presented storyworlds, he warns the reader against the mimetic claims of the characters on both levels. Thus, as it is argued in this paper, reading Collins's preface plays a central role in the reader's evaluation of the narrators' claims in the storyworld. In the last paragraph of his preface, Collins explicitly repudiates the realistic or non-fictional aspect of his tales by highlighting their fictional authenticity: "These stories are entirely of my own imagining, constructing, and writing [...] they are not borrowed children. The members of my own literary family are indeed increasing so fast as to render the very idea of borrowing quite out of the question" (Collins, 2019, p. 2). His authorial discourse, therefore, performs a non-mimetic function by guiding us to and warning us against the primary narrator and his wife's fictive or invented discourse presented in the prologues to the stories. Dual discourse, as employed in *After Dark*, prevents readers from being deceived by narrators' verisimilar and mimetic claims, which are designed to immerse them in the storyworld. Instead, it enhances readers' ability to analyse and examine the storyworld discourse by maintaining a distance between the narratorial mimetic claims and the authorial non-mimetic comments. In other words, readers become aware of the fictional nature of the presented stories in *After Dark* before entering them.

In *After Dark*, the author's preface highlights the role of fabrication and construction in both the stories and their presentation, contrasting with the skilful storytelling rhetoric on the two levels of the storyworld, which emphasizes the mimetic or realistic aspect of the presented stories. In this way, the narrative discourse in *After Dark* is presented in opposition to the authorial discourse in terms of mimesis which, in Mathew Potolsky's (2006) words: "Most often (but inadequately) translated from the Greek as 'imitation', mimesis describes the relationship between artistic images and reality: art is a copy of the real" (p. 1). The primary narrator's prologues, epilogue, and his wife's diary entries, which sandwich the six stories, contradict the author's anti-mimetic discourse about the collection presented in his general preface to *After Dark*.

The (Anti)Mimetic Stance in *After Dark*

Collins's story collection opens with the author's prefatory writing or preface. Then, standing with her husband on the first level of the story universe, the primary narrator's wife shares with us some pages from her diary in which she tells us how she encouraged her husband to recount some of the stories he had heard. After that, the primary narrator's prologues are placed before the arrangement of the six stories. There is also only one epilogue in the collection, which comes at the end of the third story. In his prologues, the primary narrator mainly introduces the character-narrators in the stories and makes some comments on the storytellers as well as the context in which their acts of storytelling took place. Having introduced each narrator, he stays on the first level and leaves us alone with the character-narrator in the second level of the fictional world. The collection ends with some other leaves from the diary of the narrator's wife. The quoted notes from her diary both at the beginning and at the end of the collection have similar functions as the primary narrator's prologues and epilogue. They both are quite willing to convince readers of the realistic nature of the recounted stories in the collection.

Thus, as this paper argues, there is a fundamental contradiction between the mimetic pretensions presented on the first level of the storyworld and the author's statements in his preface to the collection. Specifically, the narrator's claims about the verisimilitude of the diegetic level are in direct contradiction with the author's acknowledgements of his own creative role in the existence of the narrative text.

The simulated mimetic discourse in *After Dark* is presented in the first narrative level, through the primary narrator and his wife. Contrary to his emphasis on the unrealistic nature of the stories in the collection, Collins simulates telling real stories by fabricating a history for them. The background stories of the primary narrator and his wife are the most important elements in creating the mimetic atmosphere. In the quoted pages from her diary, the primary narrator's wife depicts a lifelike situation that she alleges inspired her husband's story collection. She cites her husband's illness and her family's subsequent concern about their financial future as the primary motivations behind the construction of *After Dark*. The Kerbys hope to solve their financial problem by selling their book of stories. They thus find storytelling to be a practical method to make money, with the storyteller's wife, Leah, considering it the only available solution to her family's financial problems. In her diary, she tries to persuade us of her husband's storytelling abilities by highlighting the impact of his stories on the audience. She illustrates her point by recounting related memories: "I have often heard him relate that strange adventure (William is the best teller of a story I ever met with) to friends of all ranks in many different parts of England, and I never yet knew it fail of producing an effect. The farmhouse audience were, I may almost say, petrified by it" (Collins, 2019, p. 12).

Leah further uses the element of memory to highlight the realistic aspect of the collection by telling us how the "idea" of the book "originated" from herself (Collins, 2019, p. 10). As she remembers, one night while sitting around in the farmhouse, a young sailor named Foul-weather Dick told how he missed the comfort of his hammock and felt an uncomfortable sensation when he slept in a four-poster bed. In Leah's words: "The odd nature of one of the young sailor's objections to sleeping on shore reminded my husband (as indeed it did me too) of the terrible story of a bed in a French gambling-house, which he once heard from a gentleman whose likeness he took" (Collins, 2019, p. 11). In her account, she remembers how she felt and what she thought while listening to her husband's narration:

[T]he thought suddenly flashed across me, "Why should William not get a wider audience for that story, as well as for others which he has heard from time to time from his sitters, and which he has hitherto only repeated in private among a few friends? People tell stories in books and get money for them. What if we told our stories in a book? and what if the book sold? Why freedom, surely, from the one great anxiety that is now preying on us!" (Collins, 2019, p. 12)

In Leah's fabricated memories, the power of (realistic) storytelling, its impact on the audience's minds, and above all William's skill at it are highlighted. After William's narration of a story about a gentleman's adventure, she remembers how she raved to him about his story: "What an effect it had upon our friends! What an effect, indeed, it always has wherever you tell it!" (Collins, 2019, p. 13) Accordingly, the thought that his "fifteen years of practice as a portrait-painter" (Collins, 2019, p. 13) could help them make money through selling his skill and art. Despite her husband's "growing indifference" (Collins, 2019, p. 13), Leah tries different ways to stimulate his curiosity and keep him telling the stories he had heard so that she can write down them. She uses the power of her rhetoric and feminine attraction to persuade him. She even asks help from her husband's eye doctor, who has become a kind-hearted family friend.

The centrality of storytelling as an art of fabrication in *After Dark* is also highlighted and signalled in the dialogue between Leah and William that she recounts in her diary presented at the beginning of the collection. When William holds that he cannot write down his stories because he does not know "eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections" (Collins,

2019, p. 15), she convinces him to narrate his stories by arguing that the content of his stories (which she calls the truth) matters more than their format:

“Who is to do the eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections, and all that part of it?” said William, perplexedly shaking his head.

“Nobody!” I replied. “The eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections are just the parts of a story-book that people never read. Whatever we do, let us not, if we can possibly help it, write so much as a single sentence that can be conveniently skipped. Come! come!” I continued. (Collins, 2019, p. 15)

As highlighted in Leah’s apparently confessional account, she is the true founder of the collection, and her husband is the agent through whom the stories are told. He narrates the stories, and she records them. The book we read is the result of their close cooperation. Thus, the mimetic stance in *After Dark* is presented through a triple-voiced collection of stories on two levels: the narrator’s voice and his wife’s voice on the first level, and the voices of the six character-narrators on the second level.

In a similar manner to his wife, the primary narrator establishes the verisimilar foundations of his short story collection in his inaugural prologue: “I relate any of the stories which I have heard at various times from persons whose likenesses I have been employed to take” (Collins, 2019, p. 18). He stresses that the stories are not his own, stating: “Of myself I have nothing to say” (Collins, 2019, p. 18). He supports his claims by citing his first-hand professional experience, which adds to the realism of the work: “The one great obstacle that I have to contend against in the practice of my profession is [...] the difficulty of getting them [sitters] to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner” (Collins, 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, he pretentiously claims he has had “contact with all sorts of characters” from his travelling experiences, has rich “experience of the world,” and feels as if he has “had painted every civilized variety of the human race” (Collins, 2019, p. 18).

As the primary narrator, William Kerby maintains his distance from the storyworlds he recounts by augmenting the mimetic or representational aspect of his narration. He purports to tell us only the stories of others. To make his account sound even more realistic and persuasive, he introduces himself as a mediator who previously heard the stories he is narrating from his sitters. He claims that the stories helped him to create realistic paintings. His emphasis on the verisimilitude of his narration is similar to the tradition practiced by the early English novelists such as Defoe and Richardson in the realistic prefaces they wrote to their novels. According to Brian McHale (2005), “The term ‘verisimilitude’ literally means ‘truth-to-life’ or ‘lifelikeness’; [...] It is the effect of realism achieved when states and behaviours in the narrative generally conform to its readers’ ideology and/or model of the world” (p. 627). In his prologues, which support his wife’s mimetic claims, the primary narrator tries to create a realistic atmosphere. His verisimilar claims are supported by the use of realistic narrative elements within the ensuing stories which are narrated by the character-narrators.

William defines his profession of portrait-painting as: “nothing but a right reading of the externals of character recognizably presented to the view of others” (Collins, 2019, p. 19). Similarly, narrative, according to the cognitive narratologist David Herman (2013), is a “sense making activity” (p. ix), and “storytelling supports humans’ sense-making activities” (p. 18). In Herman’s words, storytelling “affords a basis for registering and making sense of the intentions, goals, emotions, and actions that emerge from intelligent agents’ negotiation of appropriately scaled environments” (p. xi). The sense-making function of narrative is also true regarding the fictional worlds in which characters and narrators try to understand each other’s thoughts, intentions, and goals through their stories. In Collins’s collection,

William's act of storytelling has had two basic advantageous functions for him. It helps him paint better; as he admits in his prologue to the second story: "I can always paint the better when I am hearing an interesting story" (Collins, 2019, p. 46). Storytelling also helps him to peer into his sitters's minds by revealing their true character or natural expressions. According to his claims in the prologues, William uses the stories his sitters tell him to reveal their true nature in his portraits. As highlighted in his claims, he uses narrative in general and storytelling in particular to display the true, or realistic, qualities of his sitters. It is upon such a constructed fictive memory that he tries to persuade us to believe the truth of his stories. In his prologues, the narrator begins the stories he recounts in his book by reiterating the point that he only acts as a mediator in his collection, since his stories were told to him by the people who experienced them in the past.

Through storytelling, William invents the mimetic features of his collection by claiming that he relates the stories in his collection in the narrators': "own manner" and "own words" (Collins, 2019, p. 178). For example, in his prologue to the third story he reiterates this fake background: "I have repeated what was related to me, as nearly as possible in the very words of my sitters" (Collins, 2019, p. 72). He also uses an analogy of a painter-sitter that is similar to the author-reader pair. As a storyteller, he does what he used to do while painting when he was only concerned with one "great obstacle," or with "the difficulty of getting them [the sitters] to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner" (Collins, 2019, p. 19). As an artist, the narrator tries to remove the "artificial circumstances" around his sitters so that he can "present" their "habitual aspect" (Collins, 2019, p. 19). He similarly tries to maximise the impact of his stories on his audience by reassuring us that he has meticulously reproduced the events narrated to him by his sitters, presenting himself as a realist author recounting the truth:

I have thought it best to tell the story in my own way—rigidly adhering to the events of it exactly as they were related; and never interfering on my own responsibility except to keep order in the march of the incidents, and to present them, to the best of my ability, variously as well as interestingly to the reader. (Collins, 2019, p. 72)

At the end of the collection, the primary narrator again highlights his editorial function: "I now purpose putting the events of it together as skilfully and strikingly as I can, in the hope that this written version of the narrative may appeal as strongly to the reader's sympathies as the spoken version did to mine" (Collins, 2019, p. 204). However, the fact that he highlights his own mastery of storytelling skill is in contrast with his realistic claims. In the process of translating the stories from their oral to verbal versions, the narrator, in contradiction to what he repeatedly claims, interferes in the order of the events and the events themselves. In other words, as the only controller of the format and content of narration, he has all the power and abilities. He embodies both the act of remembering and the object of remembrance. In the absence of any other narration from the recounted storyworlds to corroborate his claims of realism, William's stories, like the author's preface, cast doubt on the veracity of his assertions.

William tries to create a realistic story for his storytelling activity. As a result of an eye problem, William the portrait painter has stopped painting and therefore has become without income. His wife's, Leah's, behaviour reminds him of his experiences in a way that he gradually agrees with her in seeing storytelling as the only solution to the formidable obstacle in his profession and life. Thus, he draws a similarity between the way his portrait subjects were so mesmerised by their own storytelling that they revealed their true emotions, and the beguiling impact of his own storytelling on readers: "If I can only beguile them into speaking earnestly, no matter on what topic, I am sure of recovering their natural expression; sure of seeing all the little precious everyday peculiarities of the man or woman

peep out, one after another, quite unawares" (Collins, 2019, p. 178). The narrator uses "speaking" in the sense of storytelling. He has his sitters tell their stories that also "unconsciously" reveal their "natural expression." The beguiling intention is a two-sided technique used by the narrator. He deceives us in the same way he deceived his sitters and the audience who listened to the recounted stories narrated to them by him all night long.

In the prologue to his second story, William recounts a dialogue he had with a lawyer before listening to his story while painting his portrait. When he tells the lawyer: "I can always paint the better when I am hearing an interesting story" (Collins, 2019, p. 46), the lawyer objects to his opinion by saying: "What do you mean by talking about a story? I'm not going to tell you a story; I'm going to make a statement. A statement is a matter of fact, therefore the exact opposite of a story, which is a matter of fiction. What I am now going to tell you really happened to me" (Collins, 2019, p. 47). Like the lawyer, the narrator states that his retellings are rejecting fiction and defending fact: "His [the lawyer's] manners and language made such an impression on me at the time, that I think I can repeat his 'statement' now, almost word for word as he addressed it to me" (Collins, 2019, p. 47).

In his pseudo-factual narrative collection, William pretends to "remember" what he once heard. He recounts some of the "best stories" that he heard by accident. His stories are his recollections in the same way as the sitters told them to him based on their own "train of recollections" (Collins, 2019, p. 20). To enhance the mimetic aspect of his storytelling activity, he also highlights his mind's skill at recalling:

[M]y memory may be trusted. I may claim it as a merit, because it is after all a mechanical one, that I forget nothing, and that I can call long-passed conversations and events as readily to my recollection as if they had happened but a few weeks ago. Of two things at least I feel tolerably certain beforehand, in meditating over the contents of this book: First, that I can repeat correctly all that I have heard; and, secondly, that I have never missed anything worth hearing when my sitters were addressing me on an interesting subject. (Collins, 2019, p. 21)

By relying on a feigned design, the narrator emphasises the natural occurrence of the stories. He claims that he found himself accidentally listening to the stories he is recounting to us. Likewise, despite having previously called it "our third child" and "old friend," the book in its "new form [written instead of spoken]" seems "cheap and common" to Leah (Collins, 2019, pp. 356 and 357). In other words, the finished text is detached from its author as well as reader; a text does not have its own existence. Leah pleads with the readers to give existence to it by doing their own part in its construction, or reading it: "Oh, Public! Public! [...] if you will only accept a poor painter's stories which his wife has written down for him *After Dark!*" (Collins, 2019, p. 358).

As discussed earlier, despite the primary narrator's and his wife's emphasis on their mimetic act of storytelling on the first level of the storyworld in *After Dark*, the author's preface to the collection has a rather different function than the prefaces found in the early realist novelists' works, such as Defoe's and Richardson's, novels. Therefore, although there is not any authorial intrusion in the diegetic level in *After Dark* to designate the invented nature of the recounted stories, the author's paratextual preface to the collection is a counterargument to the mimetic claims of the primary narrator in the diegetic level. A paratext is an intentional sign of communicating the inventiveness of a narrative, or in Simona Zetterberg Gjerlevsen's words, "Paratexts [...] designate a narrative as a 'novel' or a 'romance'" (179). The authorial paratext in *After Dark* characterises it as an invented, or diegetic, narrative. This is counter to the primary narrator's claims presented in his six prefaces. Therefore, having read the preface before reading the primary narrator's and his wife's accompanying notes, the reader can hardly agree with the verisimilar nature of the

characters' statements on the first level of the storyworld. Similarly, the author's preface encourages readers to critically evaluate the primary narrator's and his wife's claims, and to view their emphasis on writing the stories down as a strong indication of their fabricated or invented nature, before being misled by the realistic appearance of the presented stories.

Conclusion

Wilkie Collins's use of a framed narrative structure in *After Dark* effectively highlights the mimetic aspect of his narration. The two-level-structure of the storyworld is a narrative technique designed by the author to enhance the verisimilitude of the recounted stories. In his paratextual preface, however, Collins emphasises the role of his own imagination in creating the stories as well as structuring them in a framed narrative format. His statements in the preface, in other words, stress the diegetic or anti-mimetic stance of the act of storytelling in *After Dark*. The authorial preface's discourse serves an antithetical purpose to that of the characters' discourse in the two diegetic levels. As this article has demonstrated, although the narrator's and his wife's primary intention is to pretend that the recounted tales are true, or imitated, stories experienced by real people in the past, the author's emphasis on the centrality of a designing historical mind in his collection reveals the diegetic or narrative aspect of the stories. Furthermore, the authorial preface is a definitive proof of the fact that the primary narrator's six prologues and one epilogue, as well as the notes from his wife's diary, are in fact a part of Collins's narrative techniques designed to hide the fictional aspect of his stories. The authorial preface blurs the border between two classical modes of storytelling in *After Dark* as it is the author's explicit comment on the diegetic nature of his work. Thus, the fact that the six stories are acted out by the six character-narrators fail to remove their fabricated or constructed nature from our minds. Acting as his intentional intrusion in the storyworld's order and principles, the author's paratextual preface refutes the mimetic claims reiterated in the primary narrator's and his wife's biographical accounts. Additionally, by guiding the reader's act of reading, the paratext undermines the reliability of the primary narrators' discourse, such that the author's diegetic discourse dominates the story mood, despite the primary narrators' efforts to the contrary.

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