

## **The Paratext as the Cradle of Concepts**

Paratexts – such as prologues, epilogues, letters to the reader and dedications – are often referred to as the thresholds of text, the margins surrounding it or additions, lying at its feet. More adequate metaphors, however, should be dynamic and active, for paratexts are not bounded by the text's aspiration to eternity: they are consciously ephemeral, updated and updating; nor are they inert barriers which the reader has to pass, mere pages to be turned in order to reach the core text; they are rather the marketing agents and spokesmen, chaperones and middlemen of the texts. They argue and apologize for it, defend it, negotiate its terms and prices, sweet-talk and talk-back.

Paratexts are the arena and the market place of the culture of the book, and it is to be expected that arenas and market places would develop their own language, their unique concepts. It should not be surprising, that certain concepts which refer to the world of books arise in the paratexts at a time when print revolutionize the world of text; In my talk, however, I would discuss a group of concepts which are not at first sight book-related, and which were formerly conceived as evolving elsewhere, in the heart of philosophy and theory, in the core of the texts.

When the history of concepts and ideas is woven with the history of paratextuality, a new, pragmatic understanding can arise of the way certain terms became key concepts of our thought and culture. Recent lexicological tools and searchable databases enable us to have a look into this mechanism of conceptual change and development. We shall find that it is located, rather than in the depths of the mind, on the touch points of the texts with the world in which they move and which they try to move.