

“Paratexts to the Four Gospels: How to Impose Order in a Disorderly Field”

Martin Wallraff (University of München)

In most mediaeval manuscripts, the Biblical text is accompanied by various textual (or non-textual) elements, like prologues, tables of contents, explanations, miniatures, colophons, or various notes by scribes, readers, or owners. It has become customary to term all these elements as “paratexts”, using a felicitous neologism coined by Gérard Genette. However, this “one-size-fits-all classification” can easily conceal the heterogeneity of the material. Not everything in this category is a literary “work” or “text” in the conventional sense. Even when it is, it cannot normally be edited according to classical criteria. Some of the relevant texts have hundreds of witnesses, others are unique to one manuscript. Some are extracts from larger works that are well attested elsewhere, some originate as paratexts, sometimes developing over time in several recensions. Some have a specific layout (like titles), others are not textual at all (like evangelists’ portraits). It is vital for future research in this field that paratexts are able to be clearly identified and categorized. How can this be achieved? Literary works tend to be recorded in claves like the CPG or BHG, whereas manuscripts tend to be included in lists like Gregory/Aland or Diktyon. What is the right place for paratextual material? And, last, but not least: what is an appropriate structure from an IT point of view? How can we make sure that any structure is flexible enough to be used but rigid enough to be helpful? This paper invites the audience on a stroll through this fruitful, if somewhat thorny field.