

**Aleksandra Pchelintseva** (University of Southern California, Los Angeles)

**Negotiating the Dissemination of Knowledge Through Footnotes: Annotation Practices in  
Eighteenth-Century Russian Literary Production**

(case study: *Razgovory o mnozhestve mirov* by Antiokh Kantemir)

The modern view tends to regard the footnote as a source of impartial, encyclopedic information, an auxiliary device that enhances the reader's understanding of the main text. However, the history of annotation, particularly in the eighteenth century, tells a different story: one of "minor battles" (Grafton 1999), rhetorically embedded in polemic and sarcasm (Léger 2002). Taking Gérard Genette's conception of the paratext as that which "ensures the text's presence in the world" (Genette 2009) as my point of departure, I apply this framework to the context of eighteenth-century Russian literary production to explore how footnotes actively shaped the literary process of the period.

My analysis centers on a specific case study: Antiokh Kantemir's Russian translation of Bernard Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*. I show how, through his paratextual interventions, Kantemir complicates the perspectives of the original by inserting his own subjectivity into the Russian version. Examining the ways this subjectivity manifests itself sheds light on how Kantemir positions himself within the emerging Russian literary field and, more broadly, within the European socio-cultural landscape. At the same time, it reveals how he constructs and anticipates his readership, preconditioning their reception of both the text and its ideas.

Analyzing the paratextual elements in Kantemir's translation of *Conversations* thus allows not only for a reassessment of his role in shaping, on the one hand, the new socio-cultural phenomenon of a Russian secular writer (Zhivov 1997), and on the other, new reading practices (Ospovat 2020), but also offers broader insight into the strategic uses of the paratext and footnotes in particular in the eighteenth-century Russian literary production.

## Selected bibliography

1. Genette, Gerard, et al. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
2. Grafton, Anthony. *The Footnote: A Curious History*. Rev. ed., Harvard University Press, 1997.
3. Léger, Benoit. “Les notes du traducteur des ‘Voyages de Gulliver’: détonation et «détonnement».” *Lumen* 21 (2002), pp. 179-98.
4. Ospovat, Kirill. “Reforming Subjects: Poetics and Politics of Reading in Early Eighteenth-Century Russia.” *Reading Russia, Vol. I*, edited by Damiano Rebecchini et Raffaella Vassena, Ledizioni, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ledizioni.12711>.
5. Zhivov, Viktor. “Pervye russkie literaturnye biografii kak sotsial’noe iavlenie: Trediakovskii, Lomonosov, Sumarokov.” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 25, 1997, pp. 24–83.