

Publishing as a Way of Creating *Wirklichkeit*



It can be said of belles lettres, and especially of the modern novel, that they were born on the boundaries of two languages. Literary and linguistic life was concentrated on these confines. An intense interorientation, interaction, and mutual clarification of languages took place during that period. The two languages frankly and intensely peered into each other's faces, and each became more aware of itself, of its potentialities and limitations, in the light of the other. This line drawn between the languages was seen in relation to each object, each concept and point of view. For the two languages represent two philosophies.

We have already said, in Chapter One, that the line of demarcation between two cultures—the official and the popular—was drawn along the line dividing Latin from the vernacular. The vernacular invaded all the spheres of ideology and expelled Latin.

It brought new forms of thought (ambivalence) and new evaluations; this was the language of life, of material work and mores, of the "lowly," mostly humorous genres (*fabliaux*, *cris de Paris*, farces), the free speech of the marketplace (although popular language, of course, was not homogeneous and contained some elements of official speech). On the other hand, Latin was the medium of the official medieval world. Popular culture was but feebly reflected in it and was distorted, especially in the Latin branch of grotesque realism. But the picture was not limited to the vernacular and medieval Latin. Other languages were intersected at this point, and linguistic interorientation was complex and manifold.

The historian of the French language Ferdinand Brunot explained how the transfer to the vernacular had been performed during the Renaissance with its classical tendencies. Brunot correctly stated that the endeavor of the Renaissance to reestablish Latin in its classic antique purity transformed it into a dead language. It would have been impossible to maintain this classic purity and to use it at the same time in the everyday life of the sixteenth century. The defense of pure Latin was inevitably limited to stylization. Here, once again, we find the ambivalence of the Renaissance image; the other side of this phenomenon was death. The rebirth of Cicero's Latin made it a dead language. The contemporary world, the new times, broke the bonds of Cicero's language and its pretense at being a living idiom.

Thus we see that the interorientation of the vernacular and medieval Latin was complicated by intersection of the latter with classic Latin. One line cut through the other, and Cicero's Latin threw light upon the true nature of medieval Latin, whose character was actually perceived for the first time. Up to that moment medieval Latin had been used without awareness of its ugliness and limitations. Cicero's Latin could also offer the "mirror of comedy" to medieval Latin. The "Letters of Obscure People" was reflected in it.

The intersection of the classic and medieval forms took place against the background of the modern world, which could fit neither the one nor the other. This world with all that was new

threw light upon the face of Cicero's Latin and disclosed a beautiful but dead face.⁶

The new social forces were most adequately expressed in the vernacular. Therefore, the process of interorientation of classical and medieval Latin took place in the light of the national popular languages. Three media interacted and defined their boundaries through one indissoluble development.

Rabelais could have compared this triple linguistic process to the *farce jouée à trois personnages* (a farce played by three characters), while the "Letters of Obscure People" and macaronic poetry could be represented as an exchange of marketplace abuse by three languages. The gay death of a language with senile lapses, wheezing, and coughing is pictured by Rabelais in Master Janotus de Bragmardo's speech.

In this process of mutual clarification, an exceptional self-awareness was developed by living reality, that is, by all that was new and had not existed formerly: new objects, new concepts, new points of view. The boundaries between periods in time and between philosophies were acutely realized. The flow of time could never have been so sharply and clearly felt within the confines of a single, gradually evolving language system. In medieval Latin, which levels all things, the marks of time were almost entirely effaced; here consciousness seemed to live on in an eternal, unchanging world. In such a system it was particularly difficult to look around in time and space, that is, to become aware of the peculiar traits of one's own nationality and homeland. But on the brink of the three languages this awareness was to acquire exceptionally sharp and varied forms.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Russian: *Творчество Франсуа Рабле и народная культура средневековья и Ренессанса*), 1st manuscript compl. in 1940; first publ. in RU, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1965; transl. by Hélène Iswolsky, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968; republ. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984; p. 465-467.

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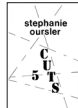
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