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THE SILENT REVOLUTION: THE COMMUNICATION OF THE POOR FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

At the end of the 17th century, 80 per cent of the French were illiterate. A hundred years later, despite a certain amount of progress in reading and writing above all in already favoured regions, their number still represents 63 per cent of the population. Throughout Europe from the 16th to the 18th century, the proportion is never lower than this.

And yet writing is strongly in evidence. At the foot of many documents the signature, either in sophisticated handwriting or indicated by a simple cross, is recognition of this for better or worse. The illiterate very often found himself exploited and

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cheated, the battered and astonished victim of justice or of 'devils' of all types. Even if he arrived at the point of escaping from the snares of the signs of which he was ignorant, he remained nevertheless scorned, classified, relegated among the menial classes, the slatterns, the scum and other villains.

But while the construction of the centralized state, the interiorization of piety and the expansion of capitalism did not destroy local autonomies, a spectacular and sensitive religion or the economy of village autocracies, and the "small people" continued to form highly spirited cultural entities in their daily surroundings.

In this dynamic, human relations remained strongly guided by word of mouth. A considerable amount of printed literature was spread among the people by thousands of pedlars and relayed by the voice of the reading public.

Is the effect of this multifaceted printed matter, until the dawn of the 19th century, innocent or insignificant? The contempt and indifference in which the elites held is could make one believe so. And until recently historians, writers and folklore specialists have not, with few exceptions, thought it worthy of careful study.

The Old and the New

In the Europe of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the poor and ignorant had no other use except to provide for the exquisite moral and intellectual culture, refinement of manners, wealth and political power of a minority of nobles and *grands bourgeois*, writers and great functionaries.

The hardness of daily life was enough to absorb all the attention of these men and women, whose thoughts and actions were confined within the limits of their community. If by chance they passed out of this restricted framework, it was never unless they were forced by some authority such as the monarch or the Church.

An Oral Tradition

Nothing apparently seems to have altered the secular ways of life, feeling, or communication of these people whose culture

and relations guard the fundamental characteristics of an oral tradition.

With many differences of detail, festivals, manners, language, oral literature, sometimes crystallized in proverbs, sayings and nicknames, sometimes coming through in stories and legends, testify to the loss of this proximity to nature, of this magic mentality, this indistinctive spirit which can be observed in traditional old societies (see "Oral Society and its Language" in *Diogenes*, No. 106).

We see it illustrated in two elements of popular life: one everyday—the enlarged use of vocabulary; the other exceptional—Carnival time.

The richness of the popular vocabulary startles the polished speech of worldly usage. The upper classes who devoured Rabelais secretly appreciated, nevertheless, the staying power of the figures of speech refused by their propriety and rejected, in France, by the Academy and its dictionary.

The screen of disparagement, which for a long time hampered serious study of popular speech and especially of the colloquial and coarse insult, having been slashed, one enters into what Michael Bakhtine calls the "bringing down" of all that is elevated, spiritual, ideal and abstract to a material and physical level, that of the earth and of bodies in their indissoluble unity.

"To bring down", writes Bakhtine, "consists in coming into contact with the earth, to commune with the earth understood as a principle of absorption, at the same time as of birth; in bringing down, one buries and sows at the same time, one gives death to give again the next day, better and more. Bringing down means communing with the life of the lower part of the body, the stomach and the genital organs, and thus with acts such as intercourse, conception, pregnancy, labour, feeding, the satisfaction of natural needs. Bringing down hollows out the corporal tomb for a new birth. This is the reason why it does not only have a destructive negative value, but also a positive regenerative one: it is ambivalent, at once negation and affirmation. One precipitates not only downwards into nothingness, into absolute destruction, but also down to productivity, where conception and a new birth are effected, where all grows in profusion. The

lower part is the earth which gives life and the bodily womb, the base, is always the beginning."

In this way rough language testifies to a mentality profoundly marked by nature, in its everyday reality and its cosmic dimension, its laughter and tears, its curses of death and miracles of life.

For their part, rustic festivals, in which scholars are so interested at the moment—especially the Carnival, times of excess—give good evidence of the resistance of the popular spirit to categorizing structurations.

In contrast to the official festivals which consecrated and underlined social inequality, here it is not a case of actors and the public, professionals on the stage and congealed spectators, but rather of participants in the local procession or street show. The Carnival regards everyone as equal. Tapping each other on the shoulder, the behind or the stomach, an excellent example of a Carnival gesture, shows well this establishing of equality. Inversion of the social order profiting from a grotesque provisional order, change of character or sex by virtue of a mask or costume, the Carnival synthesizes and combines all aspirations to universal unity, social and psychological.

Did all these popular communities, oral in their mentality, attitudes and behaviour, resist the condemnations of Lutheran asceticism or the normative Reason of the century of the Enlightenment?

Perhaps it is already too late to put the question in these terms: in the poor quarters of the town where the new ordering of daily life discouraged even the desire to demand traditional rejoicing in the remotest corners of the countryside, some new characters made their appearances. They were the carriers of popular writings which were to change mentalities profoundly.

Written Initiatives

The essential element in the diffusion of popular writings was the pedlars who travelled through the countryside, attended the village fairs and little markets, went through towns and sometimes stopped and established themselves as street vendors.

In their stalls or packs, some small booklets, sold at one or

two sols, found a place among the buttons, needles, spectacles, miracle cures and lilac sachés.[1] The few pages are of poor-quality paper which soaks up ink, crowded with writing. The letters, printed by worn-out type, many of them of wood, are hard to read and leave images of over-inked or hesitant marks. The roughly bound brochures often have a simple blue sheet of paper as a cover, without any title or spine—for which reason they are often known as the "Blue Library." Hideous paper and similar lettering: it is said, notes Nisard in 1852 about the almanac of Lièges, that without these two factors they would have been less real and would not have sold.

The provisioning of these was made by a printer-publisher, the first of which, in France, to produce these popular pieces in large numbers undoubtedly appeared at the beginning of the 17th century at Troyes. The pedlar told him of the demand, indicated their success and brought back the unsold copies; the merchant was thus the informer and the relay between the printer and his clients.

These are, as a text of 1660 disdainfully writes, "almanacs, spelling pamphlets, ordinary and extraordinary gazettes, legends and little novels by Melusine, Maugis, the four Aymon brothers, Geoffroy the big-toothed, Valentin and Ourson, hunting notes, dirty and villainous songs dictated by a foul spirit, satirical and country songs, court airs and drinking songs."

Very innocent stories, at first sight, which do not seem to be very risky or to encroach upon the power elites.

Certain indications, gleaned above all from repressive measures or controls created during the 17th and 18th centuries show us on occasion, without doubt, a certain inquietude. The most important may be the printing tax imposed in England in 1712, the main objective of which was to kill the cheap press which was penetrating to the people and assisting children to learn to read.

On reflection, however, this example rapidly ceases to be representative of a general attitude, as much by its rigour as its

[1] Certainly it was there that George Sand bought a couple for the needs of the little Fadette.

content. It aims, in effect, at the political content of the press which did not appear in popular literature at this time. With regard to this literature, such a measure remains exceptional also in the sureness of its application.

More typical is the French ordinance of 1635 which provides for a strict control of pedlars but which, less because of an absense of policing means than a lack of convinction, was never really applied.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the large majority of the people were still agricultural and the institution of peddling which addressed itself to them was mainly concentrated in the country. Unlike the bookseller, the pedlar appeared first in rural areas, roving about and drumming up business.

But we find some pedlars staying in the town and their nomadism sometimes stopped there: in Paris, the Square of Notre Dame, the bridges and the quays of the Seine become their selling points. One even finds among them booksellers who may have had an elegant shop in the University or Palace quarter but who did not disdain popular sales around the Pont Neuf.

People of the big cities also had the chance to keep in contact with newspapers, billboards, and even perhaps nibble unconsciously at the fringes of intellectual culture. In the villages and hamlets on the other hand, the literature brought by the pedlars represented the only possible reading for the people of the soil.

When we say reading, we must nearly always understand reading-listening or reading-watching (we will speak of this latter in connection with almanacs and illustrations).

The first produced a new outlet for popular literature: the reading public. Student on holiday, demobilized soldier, verger or curate—one always found, even in the remotest village, a man who knew how to read. And he read when evening came, in company round the fire, in these groups, as old as the world which came to life again every night when darkness reigned. "Having been read out loud (as after you may hear), you found that these tales were afterwards repeated, commented upon, compared with the closely related oral tradition, even re-read according to the pleasure of the audience, and very often changed about" (R. Mandrou).

Thus the content of oral tradition is found "transmitted in some way by the reader, who may be at the same time story-teller and reader, but who uses an aid, the little pamphlet covered with blue paper quickly faded and soiled, in which one of his stories is written" (*id.*).

But are we simply talking about a new transmission of old goods? And would the way of writing remain innocent here?

Popular Literature and Imagery

What do we find in the popular literature of the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe?[2] Robert Mandrou gives us a first hint in his analysis of the contents of the Blue Library of Troyes.[3]

Books of piety (26% of the contents) have a comfortable lead; they are booklets of hymns, little catechisms, works of devotion and saints' lives. Two categories follow with an equal number of publications (17.5%); the first, which one could call "*knowledge of the world*," comprises 54 calendars, in some ways the best-sellers of the contents—and 26 scientific, pseudo-scientific or technical booklets: the occult sciences, very elementary manuals about the blacksmith's trade, cooking, gardening, etc. The other category collects a series of novels, burlesque *farces*, profane *songs* and little theatrical pieces of a popular artistic vein where unity is found more in tone than in theme; one can add about ten works (2%) to this, consisting in selections from classical literature. Next come two other groups, each representing 11% of the contents, made up partly by *tales* (told from fairy lore and episodic stories) and games, professions (apprenticeships), education (little treatises) which Mandrou puts under the heading of "*social life.*" Lastly there remain 40

[2] To confront this question let us refer ourselves above all to the case of France where some studies on the misunderstood past, based on minute inventories, are offered to us by the research of scholars such as Mandrou and Bollème; we do not know of works of this kind in other European countries.

[3] As well as approximately 450 booklets to which it seems necessary to add about ten selected (and sometimes deformed) works coming from classical literature which, according to the author, express a completely different mentality but make up, nevertheless, a part of the Troyes stock (the choices, very selective, as Mandrou remarks, of plays by Corneille, fables of La Fontaine or Aesop, are nonetheless meaningful).

historical writings (9%) of a mythological form where Charlemagne takes up a lot of space, and about 30 fascicles (6%) that the author classifies as an *expression* of profane love, of death and of crime.

These divisions may certainly be open to criticism: are the saints' lives, in which miracles run through every page, really books of piety? Profane love, death and crime cover, at least in part, the "romantic" universe—a term which is in itself arguable if it is taken in its 18th century sense. Are the brochures of trade apprenticeship and the technical manuals so different that it is necessary to put them into different categories?

But all this is not worth a quarrel with the scrupulous author Mandrou, whose inventory, *mutatis mutandis*, can be taken as a reference point of what is distributed in the blue booklets throughout Europe at this time.

Do these booklets cover all the literature of the pedlars or of the public place? One category is curiously absent, that of the *canards* or poor newspapers, the importance of which Seguin however underlines. Another does not appear as such: the *almanacs*, in which the rich contents embrace more categories than Mandrou notes. A place must finally be given to naïve *prints*, the forerunners of a modern visual literature.

In this abundant collection in which everything is often mixed together, revealing a mentality which has not yet mastered reason, four categories hold our attention: pious literature—the most numerous; almanacs with their changing contents; *canards* linked—at least they claim to be—with various facts of the moment; and finally popular imagery, undoubtedly the most cunningly disturbing of the four.

Pious Books

"It is not so much religion that these small books teach but its practices, which are not always easy to accept even with the strongest faith. With very little reasoning, rarely reaching an elevated level, with a very mediocre regard for persuading souls but the pronounced intention of hammering terror into the readers, or yet of putting them at ease, they prescribe puerile obligations, the accomplishment of which results, one is assured,

in salvation. I may add that mere possession of these books is sometimes recommended as if each of them were a relic that could assure us the conquest of all sorts of good things in this world and the next."

Such are the terms chosen 130 years ago by Nisard, the secretary attached to the French commission on peddling, to stigmatize these popular books dealing with religion or morals, which did not hesitate to depict in halting verse the frolics of the Prodigal Son with girls of pleasure or the arts employed by Judith to seduce Holofernes, which "is not very likely to inspire serious and, above all, edifying thoughts."

Nisard, with the good will and dynamism of the censor, cuts away merrily. Less ardour and more reflection would be more useful in the analysis of the tendencies and communication mechanisms underlying the contents and their modes of expression.

In the pious popular literature of the 17th and 18th centuries, saints' lives always held an important place. As in the Middle Ages, they reported a small number of authentic contemporary acts from the lives of these remarkable men, but a considerable number of exploits which are apocryphal and contemporary to the spreading of their cult. Worded for the people, these documents are also in a sense *by* the people as they were written under their dictation. At a time when certain erudite monks settled down to critical purification of mediaeval hagiography, it was in the little blue books that these persecuted parahistoric narratives found refuge. Here no place was given to fine distinctions of theology, dogma or high casuistry; "who believes in Jesus and Mary also believes in the devil, sorcerers, healers and "tricksters" of all kinds, in Nostradamus and in rains of blood." (P. Goubert).

Alongside these heroic and miraculous tales spun out in hymns and children's songs, the little catechisms present rather a written dogma and morality, cased in distinct questions and clear answers. The success of these booklets cannot be explained only by pressure from the clergy. Does it not rather reveal an obscure need among the people for stable written reference points, and consequently a distrust of oral memory and the efflorescence of the imagination?

The success of these little booklets paves the way for another change. Restricted until then to the zeal of the clerics and the

cultivated faithful, catechisms were now in the thatched cottages where they announced a more personal way of feeling and living one's faith.

Disparities and incoherences apart, three tendencies seem to emerge from the blue books of piety. On the one hand one notices the upholding of a sentimental, miraculous universe strongly attached to the thread of daily life: on the other, the possible beginning of new attitudes through the establishment, through printed matter, of a tightly structured code of beliefs and behaviour, and the way through writing to a generalization of individual pious practices.

The Almanacs

In its most elementary form for those who could not read, the almanac was printed as a small illustrated calendar of pictures, figures and signs. In this it shows its distant origins, with many tables of time division which one finds in ancient civilizations: Egypt, China, Greece, Roman annals, mediaeval computations. But its more immediate ancestors were born with printing,[4] and it is not until the 17th century that it made its appearance in the popular literature of the pedlars.

The good people located in it religious festivals and holidays, the phases of the moon, meteorological predictions, vague and risky, propitious times for purchases or responsibilities determined by the body or the earth.

Soon, however, other elements came to enrich this basic content: historical and biblical chronology, mention of fairs, timetables of couriers and later, anecdotes, fables and tales, *i.e.* of sustained texts. The almanac consisted mainly of borrowings from other sectors of the literature of peddling, from which it occasionally took whole passages of texts.

In the almanac, astrology plays a very important rôle, not in the sense of the narrowly exact science, but in the subtle art of reading in the star signs the destiny of men. The prophecies

[4] *Le grand Kalendrier et Compost des Bergiers avecq leur astrologie et plusieurs autres choses*—noted in Nicolas Le Rouges' edition of 1510—is a universal calender of erudite origin.

inspired by the celestial vault and the overflowing imagination of those contemplating the zodiac is a very old practice which the almanac takes up at a time when the enlightened pretended to turn away from it. Moult, Nostradamus, Mathieu and Leansberg are thus the great masters to whom one is referred. The authorities having forbidden, in the previous century, predictions concerned with public people and things,[5] the forecasters had the good taste to limit themselves to inoffensive subjects.

According to Geneviève Bollème's analysis, another area had increasing success in the almanac; the history "which disengages itself little by little from astrological themes, miraculous history and sometimes fairy lore, history which is told as a story, linked with mythology and to a symbolism which had varied very little over the course of centuries."

But Bollème goes further. In so far as the public changes and grows bigger as time passes, new tastes and interests appear; the reader, at first satisfied with prophecies and horoscopes, later looked toward a more useful encyclopaedic question, closer to reality, less anecdotal—*i.e.* there was the awakening of an interest in the facts of public life.

This thesis is neither clearly established nor completely analyzed—the author perhaps generalizes a little hastily about the elements discovered in the analysis of *Messager boiteux*. She does not deserve less attention for this, however, because, if proved correct, she would indicate the beginning of a current of general interest in what one will soon call the information or at least the "great" information of reality. Our analysis of *canards* testifies to this transformation.

We can see more or less throughout the evolution of the almanac and its confusion of themes, a growing ambiguity which establishes itself between the imaginary and the possible, dream and reality. Parallel to this tendency we see some elements of rupture work their way into the popular spirit, causing division between a traditional, spontaneous, intuitive

[5] Published in 1579 by Henry III in France, the decision of 1585 of Pope Sixtus V, etc. In the edition of *Mathieu Leansberg* 1811 one may read: "It was in 1636 that M. Leansberg began his predictions, in announcing to the whole world the good and evil that seemed likely to come, but with scrupulous attention to avoid all personal references."

understanding and one brought about by the graphic reduction of the reading tables of time, of the earth and the sky.

The Canards

Derived from occasional information and specialized in the unusual and sensational which others neglected, the *canard* came into existence around 1530. Monsters, miracles and crimes were the objects of these publications, which had rapid success.

The description of unusual natural phenomena such as the passage of a comet, terrible floods, a devastating tempest and other plagues of that kind comprise a first group. It offered to the writing hacks of natural explanations the opportunity of waving over the heads of the credulous people not only the thunderbolts of heaven but also those of a terrifying and repressive morality.

Miracles and spells did not exist outside the plans of their authors (good souls and the devil), of acts (the marvels of light and the maleficent darknesses) and of receivers (beneficiaries or victims of evil). Manicheism finds here a wide field of expression, and a great wealth of details presented as true, stirring in their edifying lesson or revolting in their scandalous horror, managed to hide the fundamental improbability of the story.

But reports of crime enjoy the most success. Very soon criminal *canards* excited and competed with the imagination in the bloody and frightful. Amputated limbs, heinous thefts, sadistic crimes, infanticides, the carving up of corpses, all these must really have provoked shudders in dark corners in the evenings of those times.

Truth and reality; those are the two characteristics which the *canard* claims to have—and it affirms them with as much vigour as it has cause to put them in doubt.

The titles proclaim good faith and a regard for the exactitude of the author: "veritable discourse," "true story," "veritable history," "very true account," etc. The texts abound in precision, citations of names and witnesses, but most of the time omit the detail that would permit one to trace them.

The fact that these great catastrophes were taken as more or less real by a great number of readers necessitated the rapid

composition and distribution of the texts. But many less evident facts at any time, at the price of manipulations and re-orderings, could keep their semblance of "news"—a term which was imposed at the beginning of the Modern Age and which reflects a new need; the absence of a date or invention pure and simple permitted the claim to a great regard for actuality, and even to bring to the present various timeless facts without even having to transform them.

The lack of an inventory does not allow a clear idea of the evolution of those pages about different facts. Henri-Jean Martin thinks that, over time, the "supernatural" *canards* (comets, miracles, etc.) became more and more provincial, and crimes and punishments had a general and sustained success.

Promotion of sensational news actualized in facts, the taming of the imagination within the events illusorily placed, selection of facts where man never enters the picture except as an individual or private person; all these, from the point of view of the social entity, appear as purely "insignificant" contingents; such, in first analysis, are the important tendencies indicated by the development of the *canards* until the dawn of the 19th century.

Pictures

The first popular prints, originally taken from woodcuts, go back to the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th century. They almost entirely represent religious subjects: Christ, the Virgin and the saints most honoured by the people; they assisted in veneration and played a protective rôle. Soon, however, profane subjects became more numerous: e.g. signs of the zodiac, illustrated proverbs, playing-cards and satirical scenes of traditional inspiration.

The image makes way for the text, timidly at first, in the form of the short legend, sometimes inscribed on a scroll, in line with the celebrated *Bois Protat*. And the text gives it refinement in integrating the illustration in placards, calendars, prospectuses, and finally the book, which the illustration renders accessible to the people of the lowest level for the first time: *The Bible of the Poor* offers a good example.

The artists, who are not the users—there was no engraving workshop at village level—worked in various fields: religious subjects, paladins and princes and rudiments of science, but also with the life of small people, trades and the crowded streets and markets. Edifying, burlesque, didactic, all these engravings do not necessarily reflect the depth of the popular soul as the romantic era would have liked to believe. The only point on which everyone can agree is a purely economic one: the popular picture is a product of artisan manufacture distributed at low price within the framework of a real commercial organization.

If the little mediaeval icon or the rich miniature of a book of hours remained a luxury that only the rich and noble could afford, the printed picture, on the other hand, was within the scope of all purses. For the first time, the small people could have in their homes, personally, a pious picture which they would have been content until then to contemplate from afar, on the altar or the wall of their church. For the first time, also, they could dream alone, looking at the fabulous Mélusine, the valiant Robin Hood or the land of milk and honey.

The commercial aspect and personal possession are in themselves important elements for understanding the transformation. Both these elements, however, supported the text, as we have seen. But to possess a picture, touch it, experience its supernatural oneiric virtues, however, set other basic ferments in action.

The rôle and usage of the image are profoundly equivocal. Already the Middle Ages had conceived a real distrust in this regard. The drawer of pictures was always considered rather a damned soul, a thief of the power of divine creation, and Clement of Alexandria had invoked the seventh commandment of God against them: "Thou shalt not steal."[6]

At the turning point between the 6th and 7th century, Gregory

[6] We find an identical position beside this in Islamic traditions. According to Jacques Berque, the word *Taçwir* (image, representation) finds its origins in the Arabic word *çawwara* (to represent) from which is extracted the name *Al-Muçawwir*, the name of God, the "Creator." "Now, how can one call oneself *Maçawwir* when one is a man? According to the same terms, to pose the question of *Taçwir* constitutes an impiety. This capacity or this art cannot, by essential definition, come back to Man."

the Great wrote that painting was put in the churches so that those who did not know their letters could read more or less by looking at the walls that which they could not read in books. It was really the conception of the era: the picture had to serve; it was there to 'be read.' But the picture resisted and it was made the object of contemplation. Behind these shows of independence is reborn the menacing shadow of the idolators, thrashed in ancient times by all the prophets of monotheism. Saint Bernard was not deceived by it, and forbade his monks to give themselves over to the diabolical art of illumination.

Popular imagery does not escape from this fascination: on the contrary, in an environment which has not disciplined a long practice of writing—intellectual, administrative or commercial—everything directs its movement of autonomy along the course to irrational unconsciousness. Here one penetrates the period of a new conception of men and things, born of resistance to the oral attitude to scribal abstractions, and its opening up to the charming artifices of the picture.

Towards Encounters of the Third Kind

"The 18th century is the period in which two practices of language coexist, compensate each other and mutually change. Popular culture, which finds itself determined by its counterpart, is oral, but the spoken word changes from the time when writing is no longer the "symbol" but the "code" and instrument of a "making of history" in the hands of a social category. We know the trust that the 18th century and Revolution put in the book: writing will remake society, just as it represents the measure of the power that the enlightened bourgeoisie gives itself. But even in enlightened culture, the oral changes status at the same rate as writing becomes the articulation and communication of the works by which a society constructs its progress. It displaces itself, as excluded by writing. It is isolated, lost and rediscovered in this "voice" which is that of nature, of woman, of infancy and of the people." (M. de Certeau).

Openings and Resistances

Seen under the aspect of the encounter of an oral mentality and of an alphabetical and mechanical mode of understanding the universe, the rich jumble of printed productions widespread among the people of modern times is not inextricable. Various indices, fragile and unperceived until time and events do not specify or affirm them, seem to open the way to profound changes in the global process of communication.

The taste for private possession and individual practices filtered into an environment in which thoughts and collective exercises had until then preserved cohesion. Certainly, collective manifestations remain the powerful resistance points, but the traditional canalization of individual emotion knows some important faults and the rejection of attempts at personal expression, the temptation to treason.

The signs of nature acquiesce in the competition of graphic readings: the seasons of the earth and of man have their tabular reflection, and sensory understandings come up against tabulary appreciations.

The capturing and materialization of the written word confirmed and gave a new foundation to the universe of the miraculous that the traditional mentality had managed to preserve and to impose on a market where the behaviour of the consumer is taken into consideration. But these same elements give to the unconscious a clue to a possible reality, confuse the dreamed and realizable and knock down the cosmic order.

The immediate graspable reality becomes a seducer and sometimes, by force of circumstance, a reducer; the contingent deploys its charms towards the evanescent; the factual affirms itself beside the eternal.

Displacements and Recoveries

To these elements, born of the meeting between traditional popular attitudes and written graphic techniques of printing, are added other qualities brought about by a questioning of the contents.

From where do they come? The engravings and booklets of

the pedlars do not have an author in the real sense of the word; the greater part remains anonymous. They are probably put together by the printing workers who write at the order of their patron who plans the themes in terms of the demands expressed by the pedlars and merchants.

One turns to oral traditions which one knows personally or through friends. One creates something totally different, by guesswork—it has its artists but not yet its professionals. If one ignores the contemporary "cultivated" writings, one finds oneself on the other hand very much in the rays of the mediaeval aristocratic library: books of piety, romances of chivalry, *chansons de geste*, treatises of occultism and intellectual calendars are pillaged, transformed, simplified, brought up to date and made sensational.

Mandrou notes on this point: "Feudal society remains a political and social myth, with its presence of nobilty of race, of the code of honour, the rule of war and the tourney, the protection of Christianity, the figure of the King-justiciary—an image in total contradiction to the environment and the actual reality of the reader-listeners of the 17th to the 18th centuries."

If booklets, pamphlets and popular songs are interested on occasion in the misfortunes and poverty of the poor, there is not the least claim ensuing. All that, to the contrary, inspires a reassuring and naive philosophy for it is not at all necessary to envy the rich for their fortune or the powerful for their honours: all passes as a shadow and, in the end, all men find themselves equal in the face of death.

That this type of hiatus should be favourable to the tranquillity of the dominant group is an idea which is commonly admitted today. Must one, for all that, speak of a literature of substitution, of its depoliticizing function? Even more, must it be said that this literature has been favoured by the ruling classes if not produced scientifically by writers in their pay? It is true that the ruling class was rather tolerant with regard to the writings. But why then did the Church struggle with so much bitterness and sometimes cruelty against these superstitions? Why did the philosophers jeer at these "silly stories"? Why did the learned deplore these "pernicious counsels of astrology which serve no purpose but to maintain ignorance"?

To these questions Robert Mandrou brings a twofold and subtle answer. On the one hand, books of peddling "have constituted, in reality, a brake, an obstacle to taking account of the social and political conditions to which these popular environments were submitted" but, on the other hand, nothing permits one to speak of a deliberate submission by this means: "Oudot, Garnier and their rivals have made a fortune in putting at the disposition of a vast market a production that seems to correspond to the tastes and needs of this public which does not touch the ordinary production of books."

Here the power of money is affirmed, this goad of profit which gave printing its starting impulse. The spirit of enterprise and private initiative carries it away in this slow dialogue set up by the mediation of the peddling market and under the spur of the financial capacity for profit between a clientèle poor materially and intellectually, but rich in dreams and sentiments, and some publishers, free as few others by comparison with the political and religious authorities and by comparison with the authors.

And it is really a mentality torn between the past and the future, a really ambiguous and hesitating view of the world and of men, a catching onto the immutable which is felt to be escaping, anguish at change at once rejected and hoped for, flight and incarnation, laughter and tears, which finally nourish and reflect deeply popular literature and images.

The Popular and the Median

Everybody in the past participated in festivals. In town, the social elites gave the signal and the model for collective rejoicings and the people followed, at once a good public and imitator.

Struck by the asceticism preached by the Reformation, made unnatural by political propaganda, rejected by the normative reason of the Enlightenment, abandoned by the learned men, the customary amusements which had belonged to the global society no longer existed except in the popular one. And the rôle of printing in this break-up was there, as elsewhere, of prime importance.

"Certainly, the ceremony of power, its necessity for ostentation,

had not disappeared and the pomp of certain political festivals of the 18th century was dazzling. Nevertheless, their composition was totally aristocratic, the work of professionals. The popular audience was not lacking but its participation in the spectacles, its entry into the game were not now wanted. Its enthusiasm was not missing but its intervention would have been sullied with ridicule and vulgarity." (Yves-Marie Bercé).

This lamentable break separates more than ever the country from the town. "The myths of modernization brought the condemnation of the old ways involuntarily conserved by those who remained to one side of the currents of development. To renounce ancestral traditions, village dances, provincial costume, was to climb the social ladder, to have access to civilization. Town clothing was adopted to sink oneself into the anonymity of the town and to cause no more laughing at oneself, and for imposing oneself on others on return to the village. This new way of dressing presupposed a dignified behaviour, a separation from the original community. The heritage of the elders was no longer a model but a gauge of ridicule." (*id.*).

But does not this separation, this contempt, this treachery leave any sadness, any regrets? Does not a rational thought that neglects sensitive qualities that it calls vulgarity, ignorance, barbary, hide a *naïveté*, an earlier innocence? Is not the romantic current that has its birth throughout Europe at the end of the 18th century a curious amalgam of modern individualism and of nostalgia for a time that has been lost?

In this vein, another element of prime importance is brought to light by the troubling convergence of observations and questioning no longer relating to the participants of the festival but to the public of peddling literature.

Was it sufficient for the reader from a village or hamlet to read, tell stories, instruct his neighbours in the content of the almanac (and of other popular writings) asks Geneviève Bollème, who thinks that this literature was not "read" by the peasants only, those who cultivated the earth, but by those who possessed it or who depended on its revenues, and finally perhaps by all classes of society, even if there were many who defended themselves from it. Interest actively increasing, the almanacs, with time, became so specialized and diversified that

one could really say, exaggerating a little, that in the 18th century each had his own almanac, beginning with the King; so that it was no longer a whim but a real fashion.

A similar observation holds true for the *canard* which, from the time it has the form of a big sheet of paper printed in recto, is found rather in the towns; they were sold at auction and bought by a public which did not limit itself only to the people. This is undoubtedly one of the ways in which the *canard* escaped from really popular culture to find a place in the large-sized daily paper of the 19th century in which it would form an important item, handled by specialized authors.

Beyond edifying booklets and pious pictures in which the diffusion outside the field of the people is unknown to us, one is somewhat surprised to discover the literature of the pedlars where it is least expected: among the holdings of the libraries of the notables of little provincial towns, among functionaries of all types—already numerous, in the homes of rich merchants and even in the *entourage* of princely courts.

Whether they believed what was written or sneered at it, who can say? It is impossible to establish a serious picture of the different attitudes towards reception of such diversified literature; and citations of some scornful and official declarations would be of no use here.

A basic fact remains: the purchase by a much more varied and extensive public than that of the poor people—a fact which allows one to understand the commercial success of these publications.

Chartier and Roche think that "it is right to think that the consumers of this literature, specific in their form and theme, were constituted as much by the bourgeoisie, who did not buy intellectual books, as by the people of the towns and the country. There is," they continue, "room between those excluded from reading and from culture for an average public, uncertain in its dimension but coherent in its attentions."

An interesting hypothesis, but too timid in our opinion. All the "book" elements in the analysis of social communication from the 16th to the 18th century reveal a great underground ferment which augurs new configurations: a time of collective indifferentiation, of culture for all and sundry, for the man

of the masses, born of a union between the oral tradition and writing.

But in order for this new human type to be born, some other factors must fertilize the fecund earth: e.g. the factory and eradication, democracy and alienation, materialism and extro-determination.

On November 29, 1814, the workers of *The Times* went to work as usual at six o'clock in the morning. John Walter II showed them the newspapers that had been printed that night on the Koenig and Bauer presses, run by steam and installed in great secrecy. The blow was rough for the men whose livelihood was taken away. Walter promised to pay their salaries for a certain period in order to give each one time to find other employment, but he declared that he had decided to repress all violence. *The Times*, the same day, announced: "Today's issue presents to the public the result of the greatest improvement that printing has undergone since its invention. In one hour one may print not less than 1,100 pages."

A new era was beginning.

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