

Spitzerian and Bakhtinian Stylistics in the Interpretation of Rabelais' Works / *A estilística de Spitzer e a estilística bakhtiniana na interpretação da obra de Rabelais*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to delve deeper into issues of stylistics as addressed in the interpretation of Rabelais' works, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1564), from Spitzer's perspective, while looking for related aspects from a Bakhtinian perspective. The principles on which the analysis is based are the concept of style and literature that crosses Spitzer and Bakhtin's analyses, revealing contrasting aspects in the interpretation of this Rabelaisian work.

KEYWORDS: Stylistics; Spitzer; Subjectivity; Bakhtinian stylistics

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é aprofundar a questão da estilística na perspectiva de Spitzer, procurando aspectos relacionados com a estilística de Bakhtin, em específico no tratamento dado por ambos à obra de Rabelais Gargântua e Pantagruel (1532-1564). O princípio que fundamenta as análises é a concepção de estilo e de literatura que perpassa as análises de Spitzer e Bakhtin, desvelando aspectos contrastantes na interpretação dessa obra rabelaisiana.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Estilística; Spitzer; Subjetividade; Estilística bakhtiniana*

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Introduction

The issue of style has been the subject of theoretical works throughout the years, from the time of Aristotle (335-323 BC), through the Classical era with Boileau (1669). This moment represents the time when fixed norms regulated the elaboration of literary works. Later, during the period of Romanticism these norms were replaced by the imagination and the subjective creativity of the romantic writer. With Romanticism, style became the object of discussion, addressing issues regarding inspiration and the creative originality of the work of art. From that moment on, there had been many concepts in discussion. Within this perspective, the romantic concept promoted greater freedom to artistic expression, which has been upheld to and throughout our contemporary era. This demanded that the critics develop new ways of interpreting literary works and, consequently, new perspectives on notions of style. Romanticism also fomented investigations regarding language, enhancing historical-philological and linguistic research in order to understand the origins of and the relationships established among a variety of languages. This investigative trend that relates history and culture demanded researcher's knowledge beyond linguistics, that is, not only proficiency in a variety of languages, but also knowledge of specific cultural characteristics of each era. In this respect, literary texts were the appropriate concrete material for this type of investigation, as they are the most vivid expression of the customs and values of each culture and each historical moment. This justifies linguistic researchers relying on literary works as a source of linguistic and cultural research.

In this perspective, the variations regarding the concept of style, related to the concept of language, motivate theoretical confrontations such as those forged between the German philologists, led by Vossler (1872-1949), and those from the Bakhtinian Circle. For the Vosslerians, the concept of language implies the psychological concept of author as subject and the corresponding subjectivity. For Bakhtin and the members of the Circle, style stems from the social relations maintained between the author and the other, present in the language itself, and the related responsive attitudes towards the social context. As stated by Vološinov (1988 [1930]),¹ style is the man and the other, which is

¹ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. [BAKHTIN] The Construction of the Utterance. Translated by Noel Owen. In: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers: Russian Poetics Translations*. Essex: Printing Centre at Essex University, 1988 [1930], pp.114-138.

the opposite of the individualistic and romantic concept of style. Thus, the confrontation between these two theoretical perspectives becomes evident in the way Spitzer and Bakhtin interpret Rabelais' works.²

In order to elucidate the relationships established with the theory that constitutes them, first Spitzer's concept of style is discussed, followed by the Bakhtinian dialogic concept. To accomplish this, the following works by Spitzer were selected: "Linguistics and Literary History" (1948);³ "Art du langage et linguistique,"⁴ "Rabelais et les Rabelaisants" from the collection *Étude de Style* (1970 [1928]) translated by Éliane Kaufholz, Alain Coulon and Michel Foucault, prefaced by Starobinski, and Bakhtin's investigation of Rabelais' works, in *Rabelais and his world* (1984 [1940]),⁵ "Forms of time and chronotope in the novel: VII The Rabelaisian Chronotope" (1981 [1937-1939]).⁶

1 Spitzer's Stylistics

The proponents of German Stylistics, taking as a reference literary works in a wide variety of languages, aimed to identify the linguistic transformations undergone over time and the changes in meaning that those literary works incorporate according to customs and culture. It is in this research group, led by Karl Vossler,⁷ that Spitzer stands out, as a philologist and interpreter of the authors' individual style, establishing comparative relations regarding literary language. Using this method, he especially observes linguistic

² The works of François Rabelais (1494-1553) *Gargantua and Pantagruel* consist of five books, published in sequential order, whose inspiration was the publication of *Gargantua* by an anonymous author (a giant of folk origin) that was rewritten and expanded.

³ SPITZER, L. "Linguistics and Literary History" In: *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948, pp.1-39. Available on: [146545103 Linguistics and Literary History Leo Spitzer - Free Download PDF \(kupdf.net\)](https://www.kupdf.net/146545103-Linguistics-and-Literary-History-Leo-Spitzer-Free-Download-PDF). Last access: 20 jun. 2021.

⁴ SPITZER, L. *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948.

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. Introduction. In: *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington/Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984, pp.1-50.

⁶ BAKHTIN, M. Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: VII The Rabelaisian Chronotope; The Folcloric Bases of the Rabelaisian Chronotope. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin, Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

⁷ Cf. PUZZO, M. Bakhtin's Dialogism and Vossler's Stylistics, *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso. v. 12, n. 1, pp.131-149, 2017. Available on: <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/bakhtiniana/article/view/26367/20960> and <https://www.scielo.br/j/bak/a/NFBqDNy7xmhVVKcTtqhgRd/?format=pdf&lang=en>. Last access: 20 jun. 2021.

variations, the different metaphorical images and the different meanings that they assume in each context. In order to carry out this investigative proposal, the philologist relies on his basic training, as stated in *Linguistics and Literary History* (Spitzer, 1948, p.2):

I had decided, after college had given me a solid foundation in the classical languages, to study the Romance languages and particularly French philology, because, in my native Vienna, the gay and orderly, skeptic and sentimental, Catholic and pagan Vienna of yore was filled with adoration of the French way of life.⁸

With this consistent training and the work of linguistic research, Spitzer demonstrates vast knowledge, covering literature and culture in general. In focusing on the expressive resources of a work, Spitzer highlights the gradual, almost imperceptible, psychologically conditioned variations, up to the creation of new words such as neologisms. In his conception, style originates in the author's psyche as an element that unfolds his subjective expressiveness. Following this logic, in his investigative journey, he explores biblical texts in different versions and literary texts as a reference and proof of the new meanings that words incorporate over time, as evidenced in his 1928 article, "Soy quien soy" [I am what I am]. In this article, he analyzes this expression in the various versions of the Bible, whose reference is divinity, conceived according to the culture of each era, and its displacement from sacred texts to literary texts from the Spanish Golden Age. This expression appears as an exaltation of the character and the nobility of the characters in self-reference, equivalent to the divine being identified in the Bible.

In *Linguistics and Literary History* (1948), using this method of linguistic-philological investigations, the author selects authors' texts from distinct eras, in a chronological sequence, among them Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, and Salinas, examining the use of deviant or unusual terms employed in their works. The question posed is whether there was a psychological source in the spiritual origin of deviant terms regarding stylistic peculiarities of those writers.

Following this purpose, Spitzer tracks the style of each one of those authors over time to verify this relationship. When selecting peculiar expressions and metaphorical images referring to the style of each author, he relates them to the cultural context where they belong in. Thus, Spitzer identified in the etymological roots of these terms the

⁸ For reference, see footnote 3.

innovations of meaning expressed through the stylistic creativity of the authors, thus making them responsible for the renewal of the lexicon and the semantics of the languages which expresses them.

According to Spitzer, this renewal of the literary vocabulary is responsible for innovations in the use of language. Therefore, it is philological work of a stylistic nature, highlighting the new meanings that these words gain connected to the moment and the cultural context of each author. Thus, Spitzer selects innovative authors from the 16th and 20th centuries in order to demonstrate how they become special representatives in a specific cultural context, as if they constituted the center of a “solar system,” to use their own words. Among the oldest authors, Dante, Quevedo and Rabelais stand out as renovators of the language due to the innovations in vocabulary, evidencing the transformation of the historical environment they represent. As he makes explicit in his proposal:

Thus we started with a particular historical line, the etymology of a particular word-family, and found therein evidences of a change of historical climate. Then we considered the change of a whole historical climate as expressed in the innovations, linguistic and literary, of writers of two different epochs (the twentieth and the sixteenth) (Spitzer, 1948, p.32).⁹

In addressing Rabelais, Spitzer places him in an exceptional condition in his cultural context. According to his evaluation, Rabelais constructs an imaginary world outside of the common reality of the population. In this fictional universe created by the author, the characters represent strange beings, whose names and attitudes are unusual. In this fantastic universe, inhabited by exceptional beings and weird behaviors, language is the expressive element responsible for both the grotesque and the poetry present in the images and in the rhythm with which the facts are presented.

Thus, in line with this imaginary universe, the characters with unusual names like Pantagruel and Gargantua also act in an exceptional way. Pantagruel, for instance, represents an imaginary character, whose behavior goes beyond ordinary human nature, revealing a philosophical behavior in his existential form. Similarly, the creation of grotesque terms results from a peculiar process in line with the names of the characters,

⁹ For reference, see footnote 3.

creating an effect of terror: from the well-known and familiar context to the reader to the unknown fictional universe (Spitzer, 1970, p.59). As he stated in “Linguistics and literary history” (1948, p.17):

He creates word-families, representative of gruesome fantasy- beings, copulating and engendering before our eyes, which have reality only in the world of language, which are established in an intermediate world between reality and irreality, between the nowhere that frightens and the “here” that reassures.¹⁰

Based on this premise, Spitzer opposes to Lanson’s concept (1857-1934), historian and literary critic, that Rabelais’ work is extremely realistic. He argues that this conception does not match the universe of the work, since all the scenes described, as well as the characters represented and the terms used, create a fantastic world that Spitzer calls “Rabelaisian epic.” According to him, “the fantastic voyage of fantastic people, [...] tends toward the creation of a world of irreality.” (Spitzer, 1948, p.18)¹¹ According to Spitzer’s conception, this peculiarity is still not enough to understand and interpret the totality of this process in the author’s works. For this reason, he proposes to carry out a general analysis of the composition of Rabelais’ works and only then analyze his ideas, narratives, and language. Thus, he mobilizes his investigative process of the “philological circle,” starting from the peripheral elements that constitute it, and then recomposing its unity. In this way, through this method of analysis, the analysis is carried out from the surface towards the vital core of the work. Initially, it highlights the most explicit and visible details and from these data the researcher begins to classify and integrate them to the creative spirit, thereby apprehending its totality.

Using this etymological analysis, from the linguistic particularities to the more general aspects of the work in relation to the history of the ideas, Spitzer traces an evolutionary line with respect to the language, noting that Rabelais forges “word families” or “word-monsters” (Spitzer, 1948, p.18) which, in addition to being created by the author’s imagination, are also conceived by the process of juxtaposition in the recreation of new terms. Through this process, the author creates a sequence of epithets that overlap each other hyperbolically to provoke terror, in such a way that, from the

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 3.

known world, a strange one emerges, due to the deviation from the standard French language known for its conformity and clarity. This process provokes estrangement in the reader accustomed to a smooth and regulated language that, according to him, gains independence in stages and over time, from antiquity to modernity. As proof, he selects the authors to analyze in the sequence in which they demonstrate this shift: Pulci, Rabelais, Victor Hugo, Celine. According to his explanation of his investigative process, he justifies it as a specific choice that corresponds to his proposal, which is not exclusive, given that, according to him, other evolutionary lines may be traced among different authors, allowing other aspects to be investigated. Along these lines, Spitzer highlights linguistic peculiarities that reveal the authorial style, which converges into the heart of one's creativity, psyche, as a way of conceiving spirituality. For him,

in spite of the methodological distinction just made, is not so completely divorced from that of the theologian as is generally believed; it is not by chance that the “philological circle” was discovered by a theologian, who was wont to harmonize the discordant, to retrace the beauty of God in this world (Spitzer, 1948, p.24).¹²

From this excerpt, Spitzer's affinity with spirituality and with the divine gift of creation is observed, which manifests itself in the psyche of the human being as a creative act of the spirit. According to his principles, the “humanities will not be restored unless humanists abandon their agnostic attitude, become humans again and share the humanistic belief of Rabelais' characters” (Spitzer, 1970, p.65).¹³ Spitzer shares the humanist and religious belief with Rabelais' character, Pantagruel, highlighting his observation that “wisdom does not enter a malevolent soul; and science without consciousness is nothing but the souls' demise” (Spitzer, 1948, p.25).¹⁴ Under this perspective, Spitzer signals his idealism associated with his concept of style.

In this collection, one can observe his philological/comparative method when selecting literary works by renowned authors, in an evolutionary process, starting from

¹² For reference, see footnote 3.

¹³ Original in Portuguese: “as humanidades não serão restauradas a menos que os humanistas abandonem sua atitude agnóstica, se tornem novamente humanos e partilhem a crença humanista da personagem de Rabelais.”

¹⁴ Original in French: “sapience n'entre point en ame malivole; et science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'ame.”

older works by La Fontaine, Rabelais, Voltaire, and to more recent ones such as Michel Butor, written before his death and published by George Poulet, in the *Archivum linguistique* [Linguistic Archives] (1960-1961). According to Starobinski, Spitzer's attachment to the author's psyche, as a transformative originality of the language, accentuates the perspective of Crocian aesthetics, according to whom the individual freedom of expression allows the author to express his inner experience and human nature.

In this way, the method developed by Spitzer, of analyzing the parts to understand the whole of the work, develops in an oscillatory movement between the parts in a circular way, as he points out: "Our to-and-fro voyage from certain outward details to the inner center and back again to other series of details is only an application of the principle of the "philological circle" (Spitzer, 1948, p.18).¹⁵

According to him, this circle is not vicious, but it represents the basis of the fundamental operations of human disciplines, which is the same process followed by Romanesque scholars and theologians. Therefore, he explains his interest in investigating linguistic changes without losing sight of the peculiarities of the authors of the analyzed works. According to Starobinski¹⁶ in the preface to the book *Études de style* (1970 [1931], p.29),

His method is the description of a path of the spirit: it is not a recipe, a method of use, a procedure, but a reflection, therefore, on the progressive stages where the relation of the reader to the text is modified little by little, as he better grasps the global meaning.¹⁷

Thus, when highlighting the peculiarities of the language in a literary work, the philologist seeks to establish comparative relations of these peculiarities, emphasizing the originality of each author in the individual style. It is a method that starts from the linguistic study to find subjectivity, its spiritual essence, escaping, according to him, from

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹⁶ Jean Starobinski was born in Geneva, Switzerland. He earned a degree in medicine (Psychiatry) and Letters. He was a professor at the University of John Hopkins and the University of Geneva, teaching courses in French Literature and the History of medicine, where he retired in 1985. Available on: <https://www.companhiadasletras.com.br/autor.php?codigo=00484>. Last access: 22 feb. 2019.

¹⁷ Original in French: "Sa méthodologie est la description d'un cheminement de l'esprit: ele n'est pas une recette, um mode d'employ, un procédé, mais une réflexion portant sur les étapes progressives où se modifie, de proche em proche, la relation du lecteur au texte, à mesure qu'il em saisit mieux le sens global."

the formulas applied mechanically¹⁸ to analyze the texts. As he emphasizes, “for every poem the critic needs a separate inspiration, a separate light from above (it is this constant need which makes for humility, and it is the accumulation of past enlightenments that encourages a sort of pious confidence)” (Spitzer, 1948, p.28).¹⁹ This means that in his conception, creation is the result of a revealing and subjective moment.

As Starobinski comments, confirmed in the words of the author as, previously mentioned, Spitzer eschews the exclusively philological method and approaches Heidegger’s hermeneutics.

In this line of interpretation, Spitzer seeks to extract inspiration for his criticism from the interpretative method of hermeneutics, demonstrating that the departure from the circle for interpretation is neither gratuitous nor superficial, but rather it starts from an understanding of the set of data anticipating the process of analysis of the parts, as a way of checking the initial direction.

This is the method he adopts to interpret the work of Rabelais. According to the author, when creating a work of fantasy, inhabited by fantastic beings such as giants, people with exaggerated behavior who are outside the social context of the time, Rabelais updates the vocabulary with neologisms, generated by the juxtaposition of terms, creating new expressions to portray the imaginary reality of this fantastic world. Thus, this concept of the grotesque as an artistic expression, whose roots are found in the Middle Ages, is used by Spitzer as a stylistic device of Rabelais. According to the philologist (1948, p.14),

Whoever has thought strongly and felt strongly has innovated in his language; mental creativity immediately inscribes itself into the language, where it becomes linguistic creativity; the trite and petrified in language is never sufficient for the needs of expression felt by a strong personality.²⁰

Spitzer’s interest in his investigation of Rabelais’ works dates back to 1910, when he discusses comical verbal expressions in his thesis, comparing them with those of Viennese authors such as Nestroy,²¹ relating linguistics to history. In this research, he

¹⁸ About this topic, Spitzer, as Vossler, deny mechanical interpretations of language, nearing the Bakhtin and the Circle’s discursive position.

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 3.

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 3.

²¹ Nestroy was born in Vienna in 1801, writer, dramaturg, poet, judge, actor, opera singer, satirist.

demonstrates that the term *pantagruelism*, with which Rabelais characterized the philosophical peculiarity of his Stoic-Epicurean character, is not just a play on words, but provides the fictional composition of an unreal and unknown world. According to him, the suffix –ism resembles a school of traditional philosophy like Aristotle’s, while the root Pantagruel refers to the name of the character he created: a giant and king that mixes fantasy and philosophy, reality and fiction.

According to the critic, through this process, Rabelais does not produce those neologisms gratuitously, they characterize the comic-grotesque and are materialized in the process of juxtaposition by which, without changing the original forms of the terms, abruptly superimposes epithet on epithet to obtain a surprising, impactful effect.

In this way, historical linguistics and the semantic perspective come into relation with culture. From this point of view, Starobinski (1970) observes that Spitzer is not limited to the application of a single method or a single theoretical perspective, dismantling boundaries, barriers among various theories such as philology, linguistics, history and literary criticism. In this process, he evidences his encyclopedic knowledge both of distinct languages in which he is proficient as a philologist: Latin, Greek, German, French, English, and of the works on which Western culture are layered: from the sacred texts, such as the different versions of the Bible, to the great literary works.

With regard to the Spitzerian conception of Rabelais’ works, it is necessary to observe his reading regarding the criticism of French intellectuals who, at the time of Rabelais’ 4th centenary, focused on Rabelais’ works. In the essay “Rabelais et les rabelaisants” [Rabelais and the Rabelaisians], which is part of this collection, Spitzer discusses the various interpretations, considering them insufficient due to the more formalistic or superficial perspective, in order to restrict the lyrical-literary aspect with which Rabelais composes *Pantagruel and Gargantua*.

One of the aspects highlighted in his comments, is the tendency of French critics to apply external historical knowledge to analyze Rabelais’ works. Most of these critics relate historical data to the narrated facts, without considering the author’s artistic work and its aesthetic value, adopting the perspective of historical positivism from Abel le Franc. He observes that, for the most part, there is a lack of deep interpretation, as they ignore the creative process of language in Rabelais with an emphasis on images, phonetic and expressive resources.

In one of his commentaries, discussing problems attributed to the superficial reading of the novels, Spitzer observes the critical tendency of M. Marichal when trying to identify in Pantagruel the empirical author. According to Spitzer, this critic confuses the creator and the fictional character, leading to misinterpretations of the literary work.

Spitzer also condemns the limitation of criticism that concentrate only on a fragment of Rabelais' works, such as that made by Fernand Desonay, highlighting the philosophical aspect of the episode "L'Abbaye de Thélème" [The Abbey of Teleme]. It is a commentary that, according to him, does not add anything to the artistic value of Rabelaisian creation.

In another commentary, using his philological knowledge, Spitzer disputes the analysis elaborated by M. Grève on the expression "*sustantificque mouelle*" [substantial nucleus] from which he draws hasty conclusions, without looking more closely to what Rabelais uses in the *Gargantua* prologue. Spitzer demonstrates, through the comparative method, how this expression takes on different meanings depending on the historical moment, from biblical texts to medieval and modern texts. In his words (1970, pp.142-143),

In inventing a pseudo story, our commentator forgets the true story of the expression "*sustantificque mouelle*" (about which Lefranc edition says nothing more); this story is important to place our episode in a particular spiritual climate.²²

Along this line, he continues to contest the superficial form of the comments of the critics from the Sorbonne who tended to dwell on historical or hardly significant aspects in the fictional and stylistic plane, forget the literary value of the novel. In contrast to this more formal criticism, Spitzer mobilizes his encyclopedic, historical-philological knowledge in his interpretative analyses, demonstrating the authors' peculiarities from the aesthetic point of view and their creative subjectivity.

Running contrary to this predominant aesthetic perspective, Bakhtin's dialogical-discursive view demonstrates a displacement in the analytical perspective, abandoning the view of the author as the original source of style and relying on the relationship with

²² Original in French: "En inventant une pseudo-histoire, notre commentateur oublie la véritable histoire de l'expression 'sustantificque mouelle' (dont l'édition Lefranc ne dit rien non plus); histoire, celle-ci, qui a del'importance pour situer notre épisode dans un climat spirituel particulier."

culture, distancing from the linguistic particularities of the text. Therefore, there is a paradigm shift. It starts from the premise that Rabelais' works represent a response to the socio-historical context of the Middle Ages, characterized by the dominance of the Nobility and the Clergy over the people. Under this theoretical/discursive approach, it is possible to establish confrontational relationships between these two perspectives.

2 Rabelais' Work from Bakhtin's Perspective

The title of the book *Rabelais and His World*²³ already signals a new method of analysis. Bakhtin emphasizes the author's social context to explain the meaning of a work considered inferior by the aesthetic parameters of the Classical era. Before engaging with the work itself, Bakhtin discusses the various critical interpretations about the author, from the deviations from the prevailing literary perspective at the time up to the most recent interpretations.

Bakhtin's investigative work is broader than some simple analysis of the work itself, because it seeks to establish relationships between the past and the present in order to understand the creative process mobilized by the author. The two essays, "The Rabelaisian Chronotope" and "The Folkloric Bases of the Rabelaisian Chronotope" of 1937-1939 (1981),²⁴ published in the collection *The Dialogic Imagination* in 1981 and translated directly from Russian into Portuguese by Paulo Bezerra²⁵ in *Teoria do romance II: as formas do tempo e do cronotopo [Theory of the Novel: Forms of time and Chronotope]* (2018) are examples of Bakhtin's analytical process. His theory encompasses a broader cultural universe than simple linguistic transformations.

In order to understand Rabelais' works, the author looks for elements present in the process of composing the novel in popular culture. Based on this principle, he identifies seven series that constitute Rabelais' artistic method: elements of human body; clothing; food; drinking and drunkenness; sex; death; and excrement, which summarize the process around which the work is conceived. According to Bakhtin (1981 [1937-

²³ BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965].

²⁴ BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.167-224.

²⁵ TN: The Translation by Bezerra from the Russian into Portuguese is entitled *Teoria do romance II: as formas do tempo e do cronotopo* (2018).

1939]),²⁶ these series, which develop and traverse each other, allow Rabelais to bring together or unite everything that is necessary for the thematic exploration of the novel.

In his words, “in prosecuting the more positive side of his task, Rabelais relies upon folklore and antiquity – where the contiguity of objects more exactly corresponded to their various natures and where imposed conventionality and other-worldly idealism were quite unknown” (1981, pp.169-170).²⁷

Rabelaisian laughter, associated with the medieval genres of the picaresque and buffoonery, originating in the society before society organizes in classes, represents the negative solution of his fictional proposal. Bakhtin analyzes each of these series in the lives of the characters representing the five books, to demonstrate how Rabelais appropriates the folk tradition in relation to time and space, which goes back to the agricultural society prior to class society. In his words,

This time is collective, it is differentiated and measured only by the events of *collective* life, and everything that exists in this time exists solely for the collective. The progression of events in an individual life has not yet been isolated (the interior time of an individual life does not yet exist, the *individuum* lives completely on the surface, within a collective whole). Both labor and the consuming of things are collective (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.206-207; author’s emphasis).²⁸

This perception of the human being integrated into the natural universe in the same scale of values, demonstrates the Rabelaisian view of society in opposition to social stratification, class division, subjecting the people to the values imposed by the nobility and the clergy.

We find in the title of the Brazilian Portuguese translation of Bakhtin’s work the key that guides his critical theory, i.e.: “*o contexto de François Rabelais*” [The Context of François Rabelais]. For Bakhtin and the Circle, the external context is an active participant in the production of the utterance. Therefore, by privileging the social context as a fundamental component for the composition of the work, it distances itself both from classical criticism, which considered Rabelais’ works less significant, and from formal criticism of the 19th century, which seeks to see the work limited to its own material

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 24.

²⁷ For reference, see footnote 24.

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 24.

concretization, or the Spitzerian stylistics that looks for artistic characteristics only as a matter of the author's originality and creativity.

The relevance of the social context of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance highlighted by Bakhtin promotes a clearer understanding of the peculiarities that at first seemed only a creation of fantasy, as understood by Spitzer. The recovery of the oral tradition of the Middle Ages as a comic/grotesque resource appears as a response to the feudal social context, whose institutions oppressed the people. According to Bakhtin, in popular culture, life predominates in all its earthly dimension, maintaining a lively joy, the meaning of which is found in its material reality. So, the material and bodily principle is perceived as universal and popular (Bakhtin, 1984),²⁹ opposing to any abstract meaning, whose characteristic is the isolation of bodily and material needs for the benefit of a reality. For him, the grotesque is not a negative value, because when privileging corporal and earthly materiality it assumes a "cosmic and universal" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.318)³⁰ character, accompanying the vital movement of degradation/regeneration: birth, death and renewal. For Bakhtin, the characters transfigured into grotesque beings would compose a metaphorical and hyperbolic imagery, typical of medieval folklore, exposing the human needs potentialized in the creation of the effect of the grotesque. Such a resource would represent the strength of popular culture as a transgression of the system established by the nobility. Bakhtin calls "grotesque realism" this tendency to explore the body and matter through exaggeration, opposing the view restricted to the artistic aesthetic of the grotesque. The prevailing feeling is that of joy, of relaxed collective expression.

Thus, the folklore of the Middle Ages expresses this relationship of the human being with his natural reality in line with the collective feeling. During this period, there is no concern for the individual centered on his personal interests. The Carnival event at that time represents a popular expression at a special time, an irreverent reaction to the system to which people are subjected.

Bakhtin then highlights the ambivalence of this vital process, of denial and affirmation at the same time. Therefore, the scenes and events narrated of the bodily lower

²⁹ For reference, see footnote 5.

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 23.

stratum and the behavioral excesses of the characters, among them Gargantua and Pantagruel, reveal the most primitive human condition.

Thus, in his interpretation of Rabelais' works, Bakhtin mobilizes his dialogical conception of language, considering that the external context participates internally in the materialization of the work. He believes that Rabelais, in recreating the popular Carnival atmosphere of the Middle Ages, expresses his response to this context through laughter, irreverence, a liberating environment in opposition to the oppressive system of nobility and religion. Therefore, for Bakhtin, "degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.21).³¹

Bakhtin highlights then the *ambivalence* of this vital process, of simultaneous negation and affirmation. Therefore, the scenes and events narrated of the bodily lower stratum and of the character's behavioral excesses, among them, Gargantua and Pantagruel, are revealing of the most primitive human condition.

This characterization of life represented in the exaggerated behavior of his characters does not mean absolute destruction, because, according to Bakhtin, the productive bodily lower stratum represents conception and rebirth. Thus, destruction represents a necessary stage for renewal, for the productive transformation responsible for the life cycle (Bakhtin, 1984).³²

In his investigation, Bakhtin starts from concepts discussed by the Circle, elaborated over time and that constitute the dialogical theory which establishes categories of analysis.

Since *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929),³³ Bakhtin presents concepts suitable for the discursive interpretation of works, such as those of Dostoevsky and Rabelais', considered less relevant to criticism. In addition to recovering the value and interest of the works of these authors, Bakhtin extracts from them theoretical concepts that make them significant, such as carnivalization, the grotesque, parody, stylization, among others. These are pre-existing concepts that are reassessed and re-emphasized by the dialogical-discursive perspective, considering the responsive position of their authors,

³¹ For reference, see footnote 25.

³² For reference, see footnote 23.

³³ BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. 8th printing. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

and their ethic and aesthetic commitment in relation to the social context. Although such concepts are centralized in the analysis of these fictional and singular works, they can be understood more broadly in the field of communication in general. They become expressive resources managed by the authors in a responsive reaction not only to the dominant ideology, which occurs in Rabelais, but to each and every context to which the subject responds. Therefore, the style is conceived as the authors' response to the social context and not just to a simply subjective process that evidenced the author's genius and spirituality, as Spitzer understands it. In this regard, Bakhtin highlights the author's value and axiological position.

Bakhtin analyzes the work and the relationships that the author maintains with the readers as a reaction to the socio-historical context. Therefore, despite observing linguistic materiality, he does not understand it as the subjective expression of the creative genius but relates it to possible author's responses to the immediate context. Therefore, when discussing Rabelais' works, Bakhtin analyzes the characters and their strange actions that make up this fictional universe, such as the giants, the dwarves, the old woman who bears a child, the bodily excretions, and the social environment in which such actions take place. For Bakhtin, this spontaneous and cheerful context is typical of the carnival environment of the Middle Ages, a time when the people enjoyed all freedom to live their lives to the full. In this way, the people express, in their universal fraternization, a joy of natural freedom that is confronted with the oppressive social reality.

Thus, when analyzing Rabelais' works, Bakhtin interprets it as a narrative in which the author/creator, when reproducing this carnival scene, responds to the immediate social context, confronting it through laughter and the creation of a world "inside out." In this way, it shows the author's evaluative position in the face of this oppressive context, valuing the natural life in all its corporal fullness demonstrated in the carnival celebrations. According to Bakhtin (1984, p.19):

The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. [...] The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming over abundance. Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egoistic

“economic man,” but to the collective ancestral body of all the people.³⁴

The strength of Rabelais’ book, in the philosopher’s perspective, consists in the representation of the popular imagination as a counterpoint to the model instituted by the society of the time. As a consequence of that, Rabelais recovers in fiction a “deeply spatial and concrete” time, which in the words of the critic:

Such a time is *unified* in an unmediated way. However, this imminent unity becomes apparent only in the light of later perceptions of time in literature (and in ideology in general) when the time of personal, everyday family occasions had already been individualized and separated out from time of the collective historical life of the social whole, at a time when there emerged one scale for measuring the events of a *personal* life and another for measuring the events of *history* (these were experienced on various levels) (BAKHTIN, 1981, p, 208; author’s emphasis).³⁵

In this regard, when highlighting the eschatological and primitive scenario of the vital drives of the human being, present in popular culture, Rabelais exposes an ideological turn in relation to the patriarchal society of the nobility and the clergy.

Taking advantage of the elements of this innovative process of composing the novel, Bakhtin elaborates fundamental concepts for the analysis of literary language. Although such concepts (carnivalization, grotesque, stylization and parody) were elaborated from the analysis of these literary works, the later reflections on language and discursive genres (1954-55) can extend to other instances of communicative/creative texts, in the greatest variety of genres.

Thus, the distance maintained by Bakhtin in relation to Spitzer’s Stylistics is due to the founding conception of a constitutive duplicity of language in which the self and the other form an intrinsic unity in their individual and social complexity at the same time.

In this way, the author’s work is understood as an evaluative response of the subject integrated to his social environment. In this perspective, the exterior/interior movement; the author’s interior/exterior is one of the elements responsible for the style, as well as its relationship with the reading public, and with its responsive attitude to this

³⁴ For reference, see footnote 23.

³⁵ For reference, see footnote 23.

immediate context, therefore far from a psychic/transcendent/subjective inspiration. In the Bakhtinian perspective, there is no separation between history, language and social context, as these relations converge in the enunciative production in an intrinsic way and no longer as two parallel realities. The conception of the subject in its concrete materiality is opposed to the duality of body and spirit that constitutes the idealistic conception of Stylistics. The evaluative responsiveness exposes the concept of the author as a responsible and responsive being to the social context. In this regard, Bakhtin values the Rabelais' novel as the expression of his ethical-aesthetic position in face of the oppression experienced by the population, whose folk culture represented a humorous reaction to the restrictive scenario of everyday life. The horizon of man is concentrated in his physical reality and in his concrete experiences in his daily life.

Final Remarks

We find, in these two theoretical perspectives of the treatment of Rabelais' literary text, two proposals of interpretations: on the one hand the materiality of the literary text, on the other the materiality of the discourse.

As Starobinski observes, Spitzer develops his method over time, passing from philological analysis as a linguistic peculiarity of the text, to an author's concept of style, considering his psyche as an anticipation of a historical moment. The language evolution depends on the idiosyncrasy of literary writers. He considers that the questions about authors' psychic and style should be expanded to sociolinguistic, and its peculiarity turns his purpose closer to a bakhtinian concept of language as Vološinov (1973)³⁶ points out. But, according to Starobinski (1970), this change in Spitzer's perspective did not modify the means used in his analyses, that is, the textual analyses to find the author's expressivity and his psyche.

So, the stylistic analysis of Rabelais, Cervantes, Voltaire's literary works, considered as social representatives, could be articulated to the historical moment, as Starobinski seeks to demonstrate in *Études de Style*, but Spitzer does not discuss the author's internal contradictions, the language ambiguity, the irony as an expressive

³⁶ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trad. Ladislav Matejka and R. Titunik. Translator's Preface. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

feature of the author's axiological tone. From Starobinski's perspective (1970, p.25), it is in the open text itself, that Spitzer glimpses affective meanings, behaviors and actions, and not in a previous experience, where obscure motivations, masked or transformed by scripture may be acting.³⁷

The expressiveness of language, prioritized by Spitzerian stylistics, present in the enunciative materiality, is also a decisive factor for Bakhtin and Vološinov in less formal genres, but the concept of style is not restricted to this expressive materiality, as it results from a broader perspective. First, as an expression of the subject / author in relation to the presumed reader and the social context. In this regard, the constitution of language duplicity promotes the relationship between the immediate context that acts on the speaker, who responds at the same time to the context, in an intrinsic movement from the external social context to the interior of the individual. At the same time, the speaker acts on the external context, enabling transformations in it. Secondly, as a constituent element of discursive genres, as Bakhtin (1986)³⁸ points out. Therefore, the style is not reduced to authorial expressiveness, but it conditions the speaker to the demands of the discourse genres. Thus, the style comes to be understood in its relational complexity. Expressive materiality serves as a basis for discursive analysis, and, according to this perspective, the stylistic method of authorial expressiveness is an aspect that brings both theories together.

However, other variables are considered based on this materiality by which the text is constituted: the author's evaluative position, the responsive relationship in relation to the presumed reader and the social context. In place of the author's psyche as the source of inspiration, the intellectuals of the Circle relate these stylistic peculiarities as a result of their relationship with social conditions. In other words, they result from the tense relationships with society and with the contradictions, expressed in linguistic materiality by the author's tone and style, demonstrating the author's position, worldview, and ideological values. Commenting on the limits of Stylistics considering the author's psychic conception as one of the agents of literary style, Vološinov (1988, p.27) points out:

³⁷ Original in French: "c'est dans le texte même, à découvert, que Spitzer discernait des significations affectives, des conduites et des passions, et non pas dans une *Erlebnis* antérieure, où eussent pu intervenir des motivations obscures, masqués ou transmuées ensuite par l'écriture."

³⁸ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

The point is that no act of consciousness can take place without internal speech, without words and intonation - without evaluations, and it follows, that is already a social act, an act of intercourse. Even the most intimate self-consciousness is already an attempt to translate the self into a common language, to take into account the point of view of another, and consequently, contains within itself an orientation towards the potential listener.³⁹

Another fundamental issue is the conception of sign that constitutes the language whose relationships are not limited to the subject's psychic horizon but are constituted in the relationship with the immediate social context and have several possibilities for materialization and understanding. According to Vološinov (1973, p.11; author's emphasis):

Idealism and psychologism alike overlook the fact that understanding itself can come about only within some kind of semiotic material (e.g. inner speech), that sign bears upon sign, that *consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs*. The understanding of a sign is, after all, an act of reference between the sign apprehended and other, already known signs; in other words, understanding is a response to a sign with signs.⁴⁰

Under this perspective, the psyche can only be constituted and expressed by ideological signs; there is no interior world exclusively psychological, as a distinct reality, separate from the social context. The individual conscience stems from this interactive process of the subject with its context to which it responds.

Despite these differences, Bakhtin and Vološinov recognize that Spitzer tries to approach society, mainly in the works in which he deals with popular language such as *Italienische Umgangssprache* [The Italian Colloquial Language] elaborated between the years 1914 and 1920 (Vološinov 1973).⁴¹

Spitzer represents, therefore, a philologist and literary critic of considerable representativeness considering the tradition of French text analysis of the 1960s and of hermeneutic criticism, in Starobinski's perspective. He becomes a follower of Vossler,

³⁹ VOLOŠHÍNOV, V. N. [BAKHTIN]. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry. Translated by John Richmond. In: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers: Russian Poetics Translations*. Essex: Printing Centre at Essex University, 1988 [1926].

⁴⁰ For reference, see footnote 36.

⁴¹ For reference, see footnote 36.

but emphasizing his critical individuality towards sociolinguistics. Both Vossler and Spitzer understand language in its living reality far from the mechanistic application of analysis or language teaching. In this respect, there is a point of convergence between these authors and the Circle. According to Sheila Grillo in the *Ensaio Introdutório* [Introductory Essay] to the Brazilian Portuguese translation of *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*,

Vossler's thought is built on the tension between the poles of the stability of linguistic forms and the constant activity of the speaking subjects and, in this sense, the Russian readings of this author, including the one present in the *MPL* [Marxism and the Philosophy of Language], are somewhat partial, as they only accentuate the pole of artistic and individual creativity (GRILLO, 2017, p.40).⁴²

As a subscriber to Vossler's Stylistics, this comment can also extend to Spitzer, considered by Starobinski to be a literary critic with an emphasis on stylistic interpretation centered on the text closely related to French lineage of text interpretation.

The crucial point that distances the two perspectives is the concept of social context intrinsic in the enunciative process in which tensions and conflicts are presented in the authorial language itself. Thus, in the analysis of Rabelais' works, the divergent aspect between them is precisely the incorporation of the social context integrated into the context of the novel, as Bakhtin points out. Linguistic materiality represents the author's response to this context of joyful freedom. It relates the author's work as a response to past time and space in the author's attempt to understand it. This way the author updates the past viewing the author's own present time and projecting the work in future. Whereas for Spitzer, Rabelais' novel exposes the unreal, imaginary and poetic world, fruit of the author's creative capacity of his expressive individuality in an aesthetic perspective, Bakhtin interprets it in a chronotopic movement, establishing relations of meaning, as ethical-aesthetic responsive attitudes of the author, introducing popular culture in the literary sphere at a time when Classical culture still prevailed.

⁴² Original in Portuguese: "o pensamento de Vossler constrói-se no tensionamento entre os polos da estabilidade das formas linguísticas e a atividade constante dos sujeitos falantes e, nesse sentido, as leituras russas desse autor, aí incluído a presente em MFL, são um tanto parciais, pois acentuam apenas o polo da criatividade artística e individual."

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Received April 02, 2021

Accepted January 27, 2022

REVIEWS

Review I

The text is very well written - which doesn't mean one should forgo a proofreading to make small corrections like pronominal displacement, double-typed words and other small microstructure adjustments. The proposal is original both for the choice of

counterpoint between the two selected theories, and for the fictional corpus on which the analysis focuses to apply the theories and point out the different results according to the two assumptions developed. The title and the text make a perfect connection and the work responds very well to the expectations created. The proposed objectives are relevant and will certainly bring important and enlightening contributions to future readers. Finally, we point out the relevance and adequacy of the bibliography, which is very well focused to respond to the objectives that guide the work. ACCEPTED

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Review II

The title is appropriate. The objective is clear both in the Abstract and in the body of the article. The work compares two theories regarding the analysis of Rabelais' work, pointing out that one is related to the materiality of the literary text, along the lines of the "French text commentary" and the other is related to the materiality of discourse. In a way, it brings to the fore a certain contribution by Spitzer, somewhat forgotten today, as well as highlights aspects of a more current style approach, which has discourse as its center. The paper demonstrates knowledge of current studies on the subject. As for the organization, the text is clear, objective. I am in favor of publication. ACCEPTED

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