



Special Topic: In the Beginning was the Word – The Word as a Technical Artefact

The Technical Transformation of the Literary Epigraph

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Abstract

In this article, the author analyzes 2000 literary epigraphs over a certain period of their existence in terms of their transformation due to the development of social thought and technological progress. The development of printed, information and computer technologies, as well as the changes that have taken place over the centuries in public consciousness, have led to the appearance of new epigraphic types of texts, as well as epigraphic discourses. If the epigraph itself is a technology for directing the reader's attention, it functions differently when it employs quotations from published texts, audio-visual sources, or invented quotes. The survey of technical possibilities demonstrates the staying power of the literary epigraph.

Keywords: Literary Epigraph; Gloss; Flash Epigraph; Epigraphic Text; Creolized Text

Аннотация

В данной статье автором анализируются 2000 литературных эпитафов за известный период их существования с точки зрения влияния развивающейся общественной мысли и технического прогресса на их трансформацию. Развитие печатных, информационно-компьютерных технологий и изменения, происходящие на протяжении веков в общественном сознании, привели к появлению, помимо традиционных печатных литературных эпитафов, аудиоэпитафов, флэш-эпитафов, новых эпитафовских типов текстов, а также эпитафовских дискурсов, разнообразных с жанровой точки зрения источников литературных эпитафов.



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The Technical Transformation of the Literary Epigraph

Many millennia have passed since the first word was uttered by a human being, but it has become the primary basis, the grain of sand with which the formation of humans, development and growth began. Some grains of sand create pearls, some create stones, but their value is not diminished. Some serve beauty, others serve construction, and together they create our world. So words are the basis of our way of life, create and regulate relationships between people. Words start and stop wars, destroy and save people, create and destroy families, and shape our intelligence. It is thanks to words that the development of technical thought and knowledge of the world became possible. One century follows another, for many millennia words have filled most of the mental space, but, like once powerful streams of water, the streams of words began to lose their power, turning into quiet waters, in which it is sometimes difficult to see the bottom behind the water column and understand what it is: whether it is strewn with precious stones or covered with a thick layer of silt – fertile soil for beautiful gardens. And then there is a need to find a word or words that hide their beautiful cut, not allowing us to enjoy their radiance, highlight them and present them to the world in all their glory. These words are designed to influence people in a special way, to encourage them to think or act, they can affect our attitude to reality, consciousness and self-consciousness, but, of course, not in isolation from other lexical units, but leading them along like a skilled commander. Such words, such generals became literary epigraphs, followed by a text that is perceived by us through the prism of their charisma, their confidence in their rightness.

The literary epigraph, which for the first time preceded written speech, as a literary device appeared not with the appearance of written texts, but much later. It is almost impossible to reliably determine when the epigraph appeared as a literary phenomenon. Based on the sources available for analysis, we can conclude that at the beginning of the XVI century, this literary technique already existed. The subject of research in this paper is the process of change of literary epigraphs over more than five hundred years of their existence. These changes concern volume, means of allocation, rhythmic organization of speech, types, sources of citation, references to the source of citation, the appearance of new types of texts and discourses, or functions.

The transformation of literary epigraphs takes place as human society develops in all its manifestations from the dominant way of thinking in each of the time periods to technological progress. Its starting point is considered to be the Bible published in 1517, and translated into the Belarusian dialect by Francysk Skaryna (1517/n.d.).

This analysis of the transformations covers the period from the appearance of the first known epigraphic text, created by Francysk Skaryna, to 2020. The *Book of Job* is preceded by a literary epigraph in the form of a poem written by Skaryna. Literary epigraphs created a little later by Pinitian (1478-1542) specifically for Francesco Petrarca's (1610) treatise *De remediis utriusque fortunae* are also a poetic text in the form of distichs. An analysis of literary epigraphs based on the material of the German language (Timakova, 2006, p. 187, 193, 199) showed the predominance of prose literary epigraphs over poetic ones. Indeed, with the development of literary styles, the percentages of prose and poetic literary epigraphs began to change in the direction of a



significant predominance of prose epigraphs over poetic ones especially in the scientific and technical texts and newspaper-journalism.

According to its position in the text, the literary epigraph of Francysk Skaryna (1571/n. d.) in the *Book of Job* occupies an unusual central position for us, in that it is not conspicuous, but is lost among the short content that was then accepted at the beginning of each Chapter. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1781) *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, the literary epigraph, while maintaining its central position, is separated by two lines (p. 13). In Stendhal's (1870) novel *Red and Black*, the literary epigraph moves to the right (p. 1), but in some epigraphic texts, the shift to the right may not be present (Augstein, 2001, p. 142). Over time, some of them moved down a separate page (Lindenbaum, 2003, p. 54). To attract attention to the literary epigraph, modern printing houses use various fonts and their combinations (Holzmann, 2003; Zeh, 1990). If initially literary epigraphs were not separated from the text using graphostylistic means, now you can also find literary epigraphs in quotation marks (Schmidt-Knabel, 2003). Modern technical capabilities in publishing make it possible to emphasize as much as possible one of the main features of a literary epigraph – isolation from the text it precedes, on the one hand distancing it from the author, on the other hand helping to attract the reader's attention to it. These include the following tools (table 1):

Table 1. Means of separating literary epigraphs

means of separating literary epigraphs	
<i>typographic tools</i>	immediately before the text
	on separate pages
	offset left, right, up, down pages
	various fonts and their combinations
	framing
<i>graphic and stylistic tools</i>	quotation marks

With the development of information and computer technologies, literary epigraphs have acquired a completely new form. Two forms of audio epigraphs appeared. In the first case, the literary epigraph is nonverbal; in the second case, it is creolized, which is a mixture of different sign systems – verbal and nonverbal signs. For example, in the article *Aibolit-66. Musical plot* (Kulichkin Blog-2, 2011), a literary epigraph is an audio recording of a musical fragment – a non-verbal sign system that precedes a verbal text. It can also be a link to an audio recording, as, for example, in blog posts (Varandej, 2016). In the first case, the literary epigraph is nonverbal; in the second case, it is creolized. On the one hand, this form of literary epigraphs allows you to better understand the author's intent, on the other hand, listening to a literary epigraph by way of a link or reference can be ignored by readers for various reasons: from personal preferences of each person to technical capabilities. Thus, the linked epigraph expands the reader's ability to interpret the text, at the same time, since it is hidden, it reduces its effectiveness. Here we are talking about the emergence of new types of literary epigraphs which can be called implicit and explicit. The less explicit, somewhat hidden epigraphs have fewer opportunities for deeper interaction with the text. In contrast, website design technologies allow you to create completely non-verbal, well-visualized literary epigraphs, for example, in the form of a banner image on a dating site of carefully tending to a fledgling



plant (The Dating Direct, n.d.). Such images, simple to grasp perceptually, can quite strongly affect the reader, sometimes much more so than verbal signs. While printed literary epigraphs include verbal, nonverbal, and creolized epigraphs, literary audio epigraphs will always refer to creolized texts with a greater or lesser degree of creolization, depending on the type of audio text. For example, literary audio epigraphs that precede a lesson contain non-verbal communication methods: intonation, facial expressions, and gestures. And literary epigraphs to a radio broadcast from non-verbal means attract only intonation.

Creating some literary epigraphs requires good computer skills and knowledge of computer programs. In this case, we are talking about recently appeared, but quickly loved by many flash epigraphs. The flash epigraph is based on flash technology, which allows to create "live" animated images, videos with audio effect. A flash epigraph, as a highly creolized text, contains a flash object, often a combination of text, static and animated images, audio or video text. Such epigraphs have the ability to adapt to the blog user, to the individual reader, and to the time of day when they visit the pages preceded by them. Thus, in flash epigraphs, the individual impact on the addressee is increasingly evident, and the text receives an increasing number of adequate interpretations. Thus, the literary epigraph expanded its boundaries from a purely verbal text printed on paper to the following forms (table 2):

Table 2. Types of literary epigraphs

types of literary epigraphs				
printed epigraphs			audio epigraphs	
verbal	nonverbal	creolized	nonverbal	creolized

With the development of science, technology, and the emergence of new social formations, the number of types of texts that become sources for literary epigraphs also increases. The development of road transport has led to the use of quotations from the rules of the road as literary epigraphs (Ilf & Petrov, 1931/2018). The well-established, quotable advertising of goods has given rise to advertisements being used as literary epigraphs (Dik, 1969/1988). Even poems are provided with literary epigraphs from advertisements (Kurochkin, 1867/n.d.). One of the unusual sources of literary epigraphs was the dagger (Bestuzhev, 1831/2015). Tattoos, which appeared at the dawn of human society and have become a form of avant-garde art in the modern world, also served as a source of literary epigraphs (Weller, 2017).

In the history of literature, borrowed literary epigraphs are known as well as epigraphs by the authors themselves. Borrowings include quotations from other works, sayings that do not belong to the author of the epigraphic text. Authors' literary epigraphs are created directly by the author of the work. In the case of the translation of the *Book of Job* of the old Testament by Francysk Skaryna, it may be more about the author's literary epigraphs with which Skaryna prefaced his translation, a text that came from his pen and which essentially explained the purpose and necessity of the translation. In this way, it introduces the reader to an essentially new text. Pinitian "decorated" the original text of Petrarca, his epigraphs are in Latin. These are probably the only literary epigraphs that are neither borrowed nor self-authored.



The desire to hide their thoughts behind other people's words, which when quoted become authoritative by definition, led to the appearance of mystifying literary epigraphs. Literary epigraphs that mystify the reader were usually written by the author himself. But, of course, not all literary epigraphs written by the author are mystifying.

The main feature of mystifying literary epigraphs is a false reference (Poe, 1838/1999; Pushkin, 1836/n.d.; Skaryna, 1517/n.d.). In this regard, it is legitimate to ask whether literary epigraphs without reference can be considered mystifying. To answer this question, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by a literary epigraph in the first place. *A literary epigraph is an independent text or part of a text from a source that is authoritative for the author of an epigraphic work.* Thus, the reader, when reading a literary epigraph, treats it with more confidence than just a quote, and the author's words gain additional weight due to a similar opinion expressed in another source. A quote that has become a literary epigraph, even without reference to the source, is perceived by the reader as words from a reliable source, and in most cases the addressee does not consider them to be mystifying, which would limit their possible impact on the reader. Therefore, literary epigraphs which do not have a reference are mystifying only when the author is sure that the person to whom the text is intended will refer them to mystifying ones without the reference. These include the literary epigraphs to Philip K. Dick's (1969/1988) novel *Ubik*, in which the reader can clearly see the connection with the work. A literary epigraph in its modern sense indicates that the words contained in it are a quote.

The original literary epigraphs to the Bible by Francysk Skaryna and the translation of the treatise of Petrarca were composed by the translators themselves, and they had no reference. Do they refer the reader to an authoritative source, or are they mystifying? Modern readers who expect reading a literary epigraph that is a quote from a reputable author's source might be mystified. Without a reference, most likely these epigraphs should not have performed a mystifying function, although based on the concept of a literary epigraph, we cannot be certain of this. We can only hypothesize that at the beginning of the XVI century, literary epigraphs could not be associated with a quote from an authoritative source, and the words of the author himself were used as a literary epigraph, which could affect the perception of the text following them.

The analysis of 2000 literary epigraphs showed that for more than five centuries of history, these were the sources of literary epigraphs (table 3):

Table 3. Sources of literary epigraphs

sources of literary epigraphs	
1	biblical and religious sources
2	works of fiction
3	private statements
4	scientific and popular science sources
5	folklore sources
6	song sources
7	musical works
8	inscriptions on the dagger
9	fortune telling books



10	Epitaph
11	Motto
12	Periodicals
13	public speaking
14	personal records
15	reference publications
16	official-documentary sources
17	Ads
18	avant-garde art
19	unreal works of fiction
20	fictional scientific sources
21	fictional reference publications
22	fictional personal records
23	fictional plays
24	fictional conversations
25	the thought of a fictional hero

With the development of society and a gradually changing way of life, the concept of text is expanding. Now the text is understood not only as written in a certain sequence of characters on paper. The expansion of the text with the concept of discourse has brought a change in its graphic emphasis and the way it is presented. An interesting experience was the placement of literary epigraphs in musical notes at the request of the publisher. The texts that became creolized in this manner include Tchaikovsky's *Seasons* (Tchaikovsky, 1876/n.d.). The development of technological progress increases the degree of creolization of texts. Films with literary epigraphs, which include the famous ones of Viktor Sergeev *Genius* and Nikita Mikhalkov "12", have been distributed. In addition to creolizing texts preceded by literary epigraphs, the literary epigraphs themselves are creolized using various means of different sign systems. This holds, for example, for the literary epigraph that precedes the program *Obvious-improbable*, creolization of which is achieved as a result of its synchronous reading which uses prosodic means, or the literary epigraph in Mikhail Weller's (2017) book *All about life* which is a purely conventional sign, namely a formula.

Based on the position of some authors (Dymarsky, 2001, p. 39-40; Kubryakova & Aleksandrova, 1997, p. 19; Kostrova, 2004, p. 10; Valgina. 2003, p. 20) in this article, discourse is considered as a form of oral speech that includes, based on the speaker's intention, paralinguistic means of communication and is not a record from any medium. Based on this attitude, discourse is always a creolized text, since it contains elements belonging to non-verbal sign systems: kinesics, proxemics, and chronemics.

The fundamental difference between discourse and text is its obligatory creolization, which occurs as a result of the use of non-verbal means in discourse such as kinesics, sensorics, proxemics, and chronemics. Among epigraphic discourses, school lessons, lectures in higher educational institutions, presentations and reports with both educational and commercial purposes are most widespread. Literary epigraphs to them



can either be voiced orally, written on the Board, or displayed on the screen. Thus, an epigraphic discourse may include a text as a literary epigraph in some cases, when it is written on a blackboard or screen and is not voiced.

Epigraphic works are now epigraphic texts and discourses (table 4):

Table 4. Epigraphic texts

Epigraphic texts		
epigraphic text		epigraphic discourse
uncreolized	creolized	creolized

During the existence of the literary epigraph, the genre palette of texts preceded by it has significantly expanded. If initially literary epigraphs preceded only biblical texts, popular scientific treatises and works of art, they can now be found in texts of all existing styles: colloquial and book (scientific, official business, journalistic, artistic). Most rare are, of course, epigraphic texts that are official business, but nevertheless, literary epigraphs are present, for example, in many Annual Reports on the activities of the Commissioner for human rights in the Russian Federation (Annual Report on the Activities, 2019) or even a questionnaire (Nedel'ko et al, 2008). Currently, the literary epigraph can be found in various types of text and discourses (table 5):

Table 5. Epigraphic texts and epigraphic discourse

epigraphic text	epigraphic discourse
artistic	lessons
educational	lectures
reference	presentations
newspaper and magazine	reports
advertising	
programs of performances	
biographies	
catalogs	
movies	
programs of political parties	
reports	
questionnaires	
notes	
instructions	

One of the most important features of a literary epigraph for centuries was its brevity. Now there are some literary epigraphs which do not adhere to this. For example, the literary epigraph in Vladimir Savchenko's (1998) novel *Opening yourself* reaches 9223 characters, not counting the spaces.



Usually literary epigraphs are put by the author of an epigraphic text in the process of its creation. But the history of literary epigraphs also knows exceptions, when texts after a long period of time without the knowledge of their author became epigraphic. In the early history of printing and publication, books were precious and rare and the choice of sources limited. The development of social thought stimulated a new view of existing books, and the development of printing allowed them to be reprinted. Many older books faded from public awareness, epigraphs brought them back into the present. The development of society and national identity is inseparable from the development of language, which explains the need to translate 22 books of the *Old Testament* into the Belarusian dialect, implemented by Francisk Skaryna in 1517. The literary epigraph he set for one of the books of the *Old Testament* emphasized the translator's attitude to his work, for whom and for what purpose the translation was carried out, emphasized the complexity, but at the same time the need to perform this task (Scott, 1831/2004).

The development of printing houses and the ability to publish a large print run for the XVI century in a short time, combined with one of the possibilities of a literary epigraph to direct the perception of readers in a certain direction, led, in all probability, supporters of the reformation to the idea of including in the new edition of Petrarca's (1610) treatise *De remediis utriusque fortunae* (p. 305, 342, 344) literary epigraphs, thus turning the original text in the appropriate direction which was effected by the distichs of Pinitian.

It can be assumed that the need to precede the text with a literary epigraph arose in connection with the change in the role and functions of this text in society and its adaptation to the changes that occurred was carried out thanks to the message conveyed by the literary epigraph.

The literary epigraph also created a special poetic form, the gloss, which modern poets rarely use despite the fact that it has existed for many centuries, first appearing in Spain in the XVI century. For most epigraphic texts and discourses the literary epigraph is by and large an optional element that brings additional meanings, but for glosses the literary epigraph is obligatory. As an independent literary work, the gloss relies on a poetic quotation, including its individual parts in its structure. A reference to the preceding poetic work as a conscious reminiscence is found in the last line of each stanza.

Some glosses deviate from these requirements. In traditional glosses, each line of a literary epigraph becomes the last line of each stanza. In variations, this strict sequence is not observed and the text unfolds as a comment of sorts on the epigraph.

One of these gloss variations is Gottwalt's (n. d.) *Variationen auf Dählings Bild: Der Wettgesang*. This variation has more stanzas than the literary epigraph provides. In some stanzas, two, three, or four lines of the literary epigraph that belong to another poet are repeated at once.

A literary epigraph may go beyond the generally accepted concept of a quotation, as a verbatim excerpt, but can result from transformations of a different nature. The transformation of quotations in literary epigraphs can be the result of both conscious and unconscious actions of the author to modify it. The deliberate alteration of a quote used as a literary epigraph is primarily due to creative intent. Such transformations in a quote can lead to its greater artistic expressiveness, greater compliance with the style, imagery of the prefaced text, and its functions. For example, A. S. Pushkin (1824/n.d.) in *The fountain of Bakhchisarai* freely stated the lines contained in a poem written in the XIII



century by the Persian poet Saadi as follows: "Many, like me, have visited this fountain; but others are no longer there, others are wandering far away. Sadi".

Sometimes authors want to preface their work with a literary epigraph that recalls words which left an emotional mark on their soul, but cannot be reproduced accurately. A literary epigraph as a special literary technique allows one not to make a reference to the source of citation, which sometimes makes one want to make changes to them, presenting the text in a light that is favorable to the author, or to put one's own thoughts as a literary epigraph. By employing them as a literary epigraph, even by attributing them to a fictional author, one's thoughts take on a special standing and assume a kind of authority from their alleged background.

Sometimes, in different editions of the same epigraphic text, the literary epigraph undergoes transformations that affect the perception of the entire text, illustrating the power of the epigraph to present the text like a skilled commander. Discrepancies caused by different transformations of the literary epigraph depending on the publication of the epigraphic text create a different pragmatic effect. In various editions of the musical play *April. Snowdrop* from Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky's series *The seasons* one finds the same literary epigraph with differences only of punctuation. In the pre-revolutionary edition of the notes, the literary epigraph had a neutral key and punctuation consisted only in a dash, three commas, a dot, an ellipsis. Of its two sentences the second one features an intonation of incompleteness (Tchaikovsky, 1876/n.d.). In a later reissue of the notes (Tchaikovsky, 1876/1964), an exclamation mark appears instead of a comma, which enhances emotionality. The first stanza acquires an intonation of incompleteness as an ellipsis replaces the dot. The sentence of the second stanza of the literary epigraph is not divided by a comma as in the earlier version, it is transferred from the second part of the sentence to the first. The literary epigraph increases the number of sentences to three thanks to the new punctuation division. Two of them feature an intonation of incompleteness, and one has an exclamation point.

Publishers often do not pay attention to the degree of isolation of the literary epigraph in the epigraphic text, which leads to different forms of typographic isolation. This typographic technique of shifting to the right is less common in glosses than in other epigraphic texts. Nevertheless, this technique is used in the modern edition of Friedrich Rückert's (n.d.) gloss "*Erhalte mir den offenen Sinn...*", although in the edition published in 1841, the literary epigraph is placed in the center (Rückert, 1984, p. 583). A literary epigraph is not a static quote, but often a quote that has undergone transformation both on the part of the author of the epigraphic text, which was influenced by his background knowledge and intent, as well as on the part of publishers, who most often exploit its aesthetic function and ability to influence the minds of readers. Among the transformations of literary epigraphs, we can currently distinguish paraphrasing, punctuation and typographic changes.

With the development of technological progress, there is a new need and opportunity to create a variety of texts in form and content. Over the centuries, literary epigraphs have varied in both form and content. If their form was primarily influenced by technological progress and a large variety of literary epigraphs appeared in typographic isolation, as written or audio epigraphs, or flash epigraphs, and if they thus became an integral part of texts, discourses, creolized texts, then their content changed depending on the needs of a society developing both technically and spiritually, which finds expression



in the genre variety of citation sources and the functions performed by them. The functionality of literary epigraphs in texts of the new format has become more diverse. Literary epigraphs decode nonverbal texts (Tchaikovsky, 1876/n.d), become provocateurs of discourses, and implement their goals and objectives.

Currently, the literary epigraph is going through difficult times. Some publishers try to remove literary epigraphs from epigraphic texts in order to avoid copyright issues which can lead to significant changes that interfere with the author's intent. A literary epigraph, having gone a long way from a simple text by way of varying degrees of creolization, discourse, and flash epigraphs, creating a new type of poetic text may disappear along with the gloss as a phenomenon, since according to modern copyright legislation it sometimes violates the rights of other authors.

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