The Poet’s Tongues:
Multilingualism in Literature
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The de Carle Lectures at the University of Otago 1968

Leonard Forster
For my son Thomas
who stood over me while I wrote
these lectures
in Dunedin
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Preface

These lectures deal with a subject which has interested me since my schooldays. I have touched on it in several earlier publications, but I have never so far had the opportunity to deal with it in a wider and more coherent framework, and I am grateful to the University of Otago for allowing me to try.

My first effort was an article, ‘Fremdsprache und Muttersprache: zum Problem der polyglotten Dichtung in Renaissance und Barock’, Neophilologus XLV (1961), based on a public lecture given in German in universities in Holland, Germany, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia, itself the expansion of a footnote to an earlier article. It forms the basis for sections 2 and 3 of these lectures. I had always hoped to be able to continue the story down to the present day. A series of public lectures by various scholars at the Warburg Institute of the University of London in the spring of 1967 gave me the chance of doing so in highly concentrated form in one lecture. This lecture was also given in several Canadian universities early in 1968 and will appear shortly in French in Montreal. It has been considerably expanded to form the basis of sections 4 and 5.
Neither the de Carle lectures nor their preliminary stages are the result of systematic investigation of problems of multilingualism in literature. The examples I have dealt with are desultory ones which I have come across in the course of my day-to-day work, and my personal experience of multilingual conditions has been almost exclusively Western European. I have tried to make sense of such material as has come my way, and I realise how incomplete it is. Even so, there are certain things I have had to leave out of account. I believe however that these lectures are the first survey of this particular problem that has been made, and I hope that they may prove useful to those concerned with other aspects of it.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to colleagues at the University of Otago for help in preparing the lectures, and for many other kindnesses besides, especially Professor Eric Herd, Professor R. G. Stone, Professor Kenneth Quinn and Dr N. Zisserman; to my wife, for making the index; to the staff of the Library of the University of Otago; to the University of Otago Press for its readiness to accept the work for publication; and to the Cambridge University Press for its willingness to be responsible for it outside New Zealand.

Leonard Forster

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Inter eruditos cathedram habeat polyglottes