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How the West was Won by Fiction. The Appearance of Fictional Narrative and Leisurely Reading in Western Literature (11th and 12th century)

In my contribution I want to focus on the changes that took place around 1100 in the relation between a text and both its author and its reader and that were conditional for the creation of texts meant for leisurely reading and consisting of fictional or perhaps fictitious narrative. These changes can be linked to a clear shift in Latin's social functioning. During the second half of the eleventh century takes the spread of learning its start that will lead to a tremendous increase of the schooled population. This growth of general alphabetisation and of literacy causes a break with Latin's former functioning as a kind of initiatory language, giving access into an a-temporal world of spiritual truth. From now on, at the schools, Latin reading was within the grasp of many. Together with the recovery of many newly found classical texts as well as with the prevalence of dialectic reasoning at the schools, questioning the traditional authorities, we can notice how during the last decades of the 11th century a disjunction occurs between a writer and the voice in his text, thus giving rise to the coming into being of the text as a universe on its own, but created and ruled by its writer.

I do not want to focus upon the linguistic or social context of this process but rather illustrate how during the 12th century the disjunction of the writer and the voice in his text slowly resulted in the writer's freedom with regard to his act of writing. This freedom seemed the necessary condition for the creation of fiction and drama, two forms of literature that were born in the 12th century and had their impact on the dialogue between literature in Latin and in the emerging vernacular languages.