

Journal of Literary Multilingualism

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Editorial



Literary Multilingualism: *The Babel of Modernity*

‘Translingual’ literature written by multilingual authors in their second/foreign language has an ancient pedigree—people have been writing in imperial languages since antiquity—but besides well-known classics of the last century (e.g., the iconic ‘translingual trinity’: Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad, and Vladimir Nabokov), the field has been bulging with new books and new authors on an impressive linguistic and geographic spectrum, triggered by postcolonial and post-Cold War developments, mass migrations, exile, transnational lifestyle, and, most recently, by economic and political globalization. Contemporary translingual or multilingual authors (I am using these terms interchangeably), such as Junot Diaz, Amin Maalouf, Edwidge Danticat, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and Dinaw Mengestu, reflect these geopolitical issues and echo the voices of immigrant communities and transnational realities across the continents.

European Jews, for instance, suffered century-old persecution and spoke and wrote in languages of their diaspora: Take the Bulgarian-born, German Ladino English writer Elias Canetti; or Sholem Aleichem, who lived in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth century and wrote in Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish; or Jerzy Kosiński, who fled Nazi-occupied Poland and became a well-known writer in America. A group of recent 1.5 generation Soviet émigrés to the United States, including Gary Shteyngart, Anya Ulinich, Michael Idov, and Boris Fishman, are now considered New York novelists.

Other exiles, immigrants, or multifarious nomads and transnationals have traversed continents, countries, and histories—for example, the Argentine-Chilean-American ‘citizen of the world’ Ariel Dorfman; or Aleksandar Hemon, who emigrated from the war-torn Yugoslavia; or ‘internal immigrant’ Hugo Hamilton, who has embodied the conflicts of his Irish German family. Julia Alvarez and Richard Rodriguez have switched from Spanish to English,

Jorge Semprun from Spanish to French, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat has written in both English and Spanish. Andreï Makine, who fled from Soviet Russia, writes in French, as does Milan Kundera, whose native language is Czech, as well as Nancy Huston, who has moved from English-speaking Canada and become a notable French writer.

A new autobiography genre, cross-cultural translingual autobiography or 'language memoir,' has been developed by multilingual writers like Eva Hoffman (Polish, writing in English), Ilan Stavans (writing in English and Spanish), Maxim Shrayer (Russian, writing in English), and Theodore Kallifatides (Greek, writing in Swedish), to name only a few. Julian Green self-translated from French into English and created a side-by-side bilingual version of his autobiographical narrative, claiming that he was a different person, writing in each language.

Multilingual poets innovated poetry using a mix of languages: T. S. Eliot wrote using a mix of English and French, the 'Babel Man' Eugene Jolas invented a new Esperanto for poetry he called "Atlantica," and the virtuoso Joseph Brodsky, exiled from the Soviet Union, wrote bilingually in Russian and English.

Translingual writers from Asia have produced a diverse body of literature in English (e.g., from China, Ha Jin, Xiaolu Guo, and Yiyun Li; from Vietnam, Andrew Lam; and Bharati Mukherjee, a Bengali from India) and in other languages, like Yoko Tawada, originally from Japan, who wrote in German and Japanese, and Kim Thuy, from Vietnam, who wrote in French. Complex ideas on language, literature, exile, translation, and East and West have come from Rabih Alameddine, a Lebanese American transnational; André Aciman, a 'Wandering Jew' from Alexandria; Assia Djebar, an Algerian; and Tahar Ben Jelloun, a Moroccan, who wrote in French.

Some artists, painters, and film directors, like Marc Chagall, Leonora Carrington, and Wassily Kandinsky, simultaneously versatile polyglots and wunderkinder begot by transitional and revolutionary times, are multilingual tricksters, shapeshifters, and fluid transnationals. Geopolitical reasons aside, some multilinguals stayed home to write; others, like Nancy Huston, Jonathan Littell, and Jhumpa Lahiri, traveled abroad, escaping individual circumstances and reinventing themselves in a new language.

I have intentionally painted the picture of multilingual literature with rough brushstrokes to leave the debate about categories, terms, definitions, genres, and contexts open for further discussion in the pages of the *Journal of Literary Multilingualism*. Across the linguacultural content of literary texts, many questions arise about the object of study: how we define native or adopted language ('stepmother tongue'), what role dominant language plays, and at what age or stage of second-language acquisition we consider an author an L2 writer. Was

Nabokov's English (that he famously called "second-rate"¹) his adopted tongue if he had learned it as a child in Russia? How can we determine writing in L2 for someone like George Steiner, who grew up perfectly trilingual, speaking French, English, and German? How do various aspects of multilingual identity, creativity, and emotionality, which reveal themselves as they play out on the pages of a novel or a poem, relate to the author? Are they generalizable? And, at the reception end, what is the relationship between a multilingual author and his or her readers? Does the text's comprehensibility depend upon an understanding of shared languages?

These and a myriad of other questions on literary texts written by L2 authors had been addressed by rather fragmented research in sporadic dissertations, monographs, journal articles, special issues of journals, and conferences in a variety of disciplines. Then, more comprehensive focused studies finally came to the fore in the late twentieth century in seminal volumes such as Leonard Forster's *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (1970), Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour's *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration* (1989), and John Skinner's *The Stepmother Tongue: An Introduction to New Anglophone Fiction* (1998).

Yet to be stamped into existence by the academy, an academic field requires its own niche—a name, an agenda, scholarly publications, and a professional community. The foundation of what we know today as the field of "literary translanguaging" (the term coined by Steven G. Kellman) was established in his *Translingual Imagination* (2000), a pioneering attempt to define and examine the subject 'horizontally,' across multiple contexts, languages, and geographies, followed by monographs such as Mary Besemeres's *Translating One's Self* (2002); Doris Sommer's *Bilingual Aesthetics: A New Sentimental Education* (2004); Brian Lennon's *In Babel's Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States* (2010); Olga Anokhina's *Multilinguisme et créativité littéraire* (2012); Arianna Dagnino's *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (2015); and Katie Jones, Julian Preece, and Aled Rees's edited *International Perspectives on Multilingual Literatures* (2020).

As the field took off under this umbrella, specialized studies of literary multilingualism multiplied: Examples include Adrian Wanner's *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Diaspora* (2011), Yasemin Yildiz's *Beyond*

1 "My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammelled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English." Nabokov, Vladimir, *Annotated Lolita* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 414.

the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition (2012), Axel Englund and Anders Olsson's edited *Languages of Exile: Migration and Multilingualism in Twentieth-Century Literature* (2013), Till Dembeck and Georg Mein's *Philologie und Mehrsprachigkeit* (2014), Rebecca L. Walkowitz's *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015), Alain Ausoni's *Mémoires d'outre-langue: L'écriture translingue de soi* (2018), Rainer Guldin's *Metaphors of Multilingualism: Changing Attitudes in towards Language Diversity Literature, Linguistics and Philosophy* (2020), and Kellman's *Nimble Tongues: Studies in Literary Translingualism* (2020).

The very first *Selected Bibliography of Translingual Literature* (<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/86m2x5x9>) in several categories, crowdsourced to and authored by the international community of scholars, was included in the special thematic issue of *L2Journal*, "Literary Translingualism: Multilingual Identity and Creativity," (https://escholarship.org/uc/uccllt_l2/7/1) edited by Kellman and Natasha Lvovich, *L2Journal* 7 (1) (2015). Other special issues of scholarly journals that focused on the subject appeared during the same decade and testified to the vitality of the field. These include Ania Spyra, *American Book Review* 35 (2014); Kellman and Lvovich, *Studies in the Novel* 48 (4) (2016); Michael Boyden and Eugenia Kelbert, *Journal of World Literature* 3 (2) (2018); and Lvovich and Kellman, *Critical Multilingualism Studies* (<https://cms.arizona.edu/index.php/multilingual/issue/view/14>) 7 (2) (2019).

In 2010, two large panels were enthusiastically organized and attended at the ACLA Convention in New Orleans, *Translingual Literature I* and *Translingual Literature II*, and some key connections between scholars of disciplines previously diffused in the academy (comparative literature, specific language-culture studies, translation, multilingualism and second-language acquisition studies, and psychology) were made. These connections fruitfully developed over a decade in sessions sponsored by the Modern Language Association, American Comparative Literature Association, International Comparative Literature Association, International Symposium on Bilingualism, among others. Several successful specialized gatherings were held, including the *Symposium of Translingual Literature: Writing the Stepmother Tongue* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBlTrwrhe-U>) at Amherst College in the United States (2015); *Inverted Runes: Symposium of Translingual Literature* in Uppsala, Sweden (2015); and *Multilingual Literatures: Interdisciplinary Conference* in Wales (2019), among others. The movement grew with these and other academic activities, workshops and panels, seminars, invited lectures, and online listservs. From diffused fragments located in distant corners of academia, we have come together to become a cohesive community of scholars, forged by a growing body of literature. Now it is time to establish a home.

The *Journal of Literary Multilingualism (JLM)* will open its doors (twice a year, online only) to a wide variety of disciplines engaged with the subject (e.g., comparative literature, linguistics, multilingualism studies, cultural anthropology, postcolonial studies, psychology, translation studies, history, ethnic and cultural studies), and will welcome international and interdisciplinary collaborations. The *JLM* editorial board is already an example of such a collaboration, and planning special thematic issues is another way to work across disciplines. We invite scholars to propose special issues, and we are planning a few of them as we speak: Forthcoming are issues on multilingual literature and global migration, self-translation, Australian multilingual literature, and literary multilingual practices in Antiquity. As we establish ourselves as the flagship academic journal in the field of literary multilingualism, we look forward to receiving articles to be published in regular issues.

JLM welcomes all forms of innovative inquiry on literary multilingual subjects in experimental formats and genres (e.g., personal essays and interviews). As a way of connecting traditional scholarship with multilingual creativity happening ‘on the ground,’ we will publish short creative works by multilingual writers and poets (one or two poems or one piece of fiction or nonfiction per issue) exploring and problematizing questions related to multilingualism, language, creativity, translation, multilingual identity, home, and exile.

In the spirit of inquiry without walls, borders, divisions, compartments, and departments, *JLM* will transcend traditional scholarly limits and will encourage authors to create multimedia references in the text from sources available online (stable URLs), besides direct illustrations, so that our readers can be exposed to a total multimodal experience of reading, seeing, and listening.

Publishing material on multilingual literature should certainly mean embracing multilingualism. But how to embrace the ubiquitous Tower of Babel with a multitude of unintelligible tongues? We have chosen Vladimir Tatlin’s constructivist model of the tower, commonly known as ‘Tatlin’s Tower,’ as the *JLM* logo. Designed to become a monument to the Third Communist International (the international organization founded in 1919 by Soviet Russia, which advocated for world revolution), the tower is the image and the symbol of internationalism and multilingualism. Designed to dwarf the Eiffel Tower in height, Tatlin’s Tower was supposed to be built in St. Petersburg, but, unsurprisingly, it has never been constructed. Instead, it remained in the realm of abstract visual representation, as a model of humanity and modernity, unified in creative expression, spiraling up to the sky to defy nativism, bias, and xenophobia, and encouraging holistic expression, language learning, communication, and cultural travel.

In the spirit of Tatlin’s Tower, we will strive to be as harmoniously multilingual as is technically and humanly possible in the contemporary “post-monolingual”

world, as Yildiz said so well. Although *JLM*'s language is English, today's lingua franca, we will ask our contributors to always use quotes and excerpts in the original language, followed by an English translation (see our 'Instructions for Authors') and we encourage code-switching and language-mixing (with translations and explanations). In the future, we hope to see articles or whole issues in other languages written by bilingual authors and edited by bilingual editors (with an English translation provided).

JLM's inaugural issue is devoted to key questions and debates in the emerging field of literary multilingualism, guest-edited by two eminent scholars, Juliette Taylor-Batty (Leeds Trinity University, UK) and Till Dembeck (University of Luxembourg), who will also facilitate the ongoing forum, "Reflections and Debates in Literary Multilingualism Studies," in each *JLM* issue.

Welcome, readers, authors, creative writers and poets, students, editors, and multilingual or monolingual colleagues, to the *Journal of Literary Multilingualism*!

Natasha Lvovich
Editor-in-Chief



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Introduction

Literary Multilingualism Studies: Key Questions and Debates

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This is an exciting time to be working in literary multilingualism studies. When we each began researching literary multilingualism many years ago, the pioneering twentieth-century work of critics such as Leonard Forster, Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, Rainier Grutman, Monika Schmitz-Emans or Steven G. Kellman was only gradually taking hold.¹ Postcolonial and migrant writers had already been openly and publicly grappling with the politics of linguistic plurality for some time, and important theoretical approaches had been formulated by influential thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Édouard Glissant and George Steiner.² Despite this, the study of multilingualism within literary criticism was seen as something of a niche interest: Much of the work focused on individual authors or specific historical contexts which were seen as exceptional or

1 We think of monographs such as Forster's *The Poet's Tongues* (1970), Beaujour's *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration* (1989), Grutman's *Des langues qui résonnent* (1997), Schmitz-Emans's *Die Sprache der modernen Dichtung* (1999) and Kellman's *The Translingual Imagination* (2000). Other important studies start to appear in the early years of the twenty-first century, such as Azade Seyhan's *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001) and Doris Sommer's *Bilingual Aesthetics: A New Sentimental Education* (2004), but research in the field really starts to gather pace around 2010.

2 See Steiner's *After Babel* (1975), Derrida's *Monolingualisme de l'autre* (1996) and works by Glissant including *Poétique de la relation* (1990).

unusual.³ Scholars exploring the field had to defend the validity of their seemingly exotic subject of study, providing lists of authors and works, while edited collections tried to team up experts on different areas of literature in order to establish inventories of the field.⁴ With the subsequent impact of translation studies, the ‘transnational turn’ within literary studies and the growing awareness of the “postmonolingual condition” (Yildiz) in the contemporary world, however, the picture is very different: Multilingual and translingual writing practices are now at the forefront of literary studies. Scholars from a diverse range of linguistic, cultural, political, disciplinary and theoretical positions are contributing to the field, engaging with literature of all periods and all parts of the world. This rich diversity, however, means that literary multilingualism scholarship can feel fragmented, with researchers not always aware of the work being done by others, and little consensus on established terminology and even on how ‘literary multilingualism’ might be defined. We ourselves have felt the difficulty of gathering the varied and important work done by scholars, and we continue to find pockets of multilingualism research being carried out in different linguistic and geographical contexts. Even though literary multilingualism is starting to feel more like a defined ‘field’ of study, there is a strong need for more dialogue.

For one thing, there are significant gaps and blind spots in any individual’s own reading and expertise. Who can ‘master’ enough languages and read enough global literature to gain a truly effective overview of literary multilingualism? How can we break out of the Anglophone bias in criticism? How can we read more multilingually and continue to challenge the monolingual biases of our training, disciplines, and institutional departments? How do we reach beyond the constraints imposed by monolingual publishing norms that prevent certain types of multilingual literature from ever seeing the light of day? Multilingual literary studies faces many of the challenges currently debated

3 Think, for example, of scholarship on authors like François Rabelais, Leo Tolstoy, James Joyce or Samuel Beckett.

4 There are several examples of this. See, for example, the “Roster of Translingual Authors” provided by Kellman in *The Translingual Imagination* or the massive work by Werner Helmich (*Ästhetik der Mehrsprachigkeit*, 2016) which, although more recent, is the product of over fifteen years of research and so retains some of the categorising impulse of the early phase of literary multilingualism studies. Early scholarly collections include works such as Werner Sollors’s *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (1998), Ton Hoenselaars and Marius Buning’s *English Literature and the Other Languages* (1999), Jean Weisgerber’s *Les avant-gardes et la tour de Babel* (2000), Schmitz-Emans’s and Manfred Schmeling’s *Multilinguale Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (2002) or Dirk Delabastita and Grutman’s Special Issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia: Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism* (2005).

in World Literary Studies, and in many ways, the task seems too huge to take on. This is where this journal is, we feel, so important as a way of bringing together diverse approaches, disciplines, languages and fields of knowledge—of, we hope, sparking debates within multilingualism studies, encouraging different voices and areas of expertise to be assembled in a collaborative engagement that would be impossible for any scholar to take on alone. With that in mind, we explicitly sought, with our call for papers for this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Literary Multilingualism*, to bring diverse scholarly, theoretical and linguistic areas of expertise together. We invited scholars to engage in a dynamic assessment of the field and its future. What are the key questions and debates at stake within literary multilingualism studies? What terminology is essential to the study of literary multilingualism, and how do we define those terms? What future directions does the field need to take? We also invited provocations and critiques of literary multilingualism studies thus far: What are the field's absences and blind spots? Which aspects of literary multilingualism have been neglected?

The result is a volume that engages with a wide range of languages and geographical areas: Rachael Gilmour's analysis of the Palestinian writer Yousif M. Qasmiyeh examines his use of an English "refracted" through the Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi dialects of the Baddawi camp. Espen Grønlie presents a close reading of a section from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, demonstrating the "reactionary multilingualism" inherent in Pound's use of Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Yiddish. Birgit Neumann examines "post-monolingual" novels by the Kenyan writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and Peruvian-British Karina Lickorish Quinn. Grutman's article ranges across a wide range of texts from across Europe, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean, and across languages including English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Yiddish, Italian and Creole. Stefan Helgesson's contribution brings us to the Zanzibari-English writer Abdulrazak Gurnah and the South African–Scottish writer Zoë Wicomb. Ena Selimović critiques the neglect of minoritized languages within literary multilingualism studies, examining Jhumpa Lahiri's engagement with Bengali, Italian and English alongside Balkan forms of multilingualism, and particularly Dubravka Ugrešić's use of BCMS (Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian), English, Dutch and Russian. There is theoretical diversity and interdisciplinarity here, too, with analyses drawing on reader response criticism, postcolonial studies, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics.

We acknowledge the gaps and absences as well: The issue is still very much rooted in the scholarship of the Global North, where all our contributors are based. Its historical range is relatively limited: The articles are mostly concerned with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, although perspectives on

preceding epochs are provided as well. All contributions but two engage with (narrative) prose rather than with drama or lyric poetry. In terms of languages, we see a predominance of English, with other languages being less prominent. Indeed, English is conspicuous for its presence even in the non-Anglophone writing examined: Selimović, for example, demonstrates how Ugrešić critiques and challenges the “parasitic effects” of American English through her manipulation of the dictionary form. Indeed, the articles that engage with Anglophone writing are acutely aware of the problematic status of English. Neumann explores the ways that “post-monolingual” writing subverts and challenges the dominance of the Anglo-American publishing industry, but concludes that we must balance this against the ways that literary multilingualism is “steeped” in that industry and in “the neoliberal economization of the literary sphere.” We also cannot ignore the fact that this journal is itself published in English, reflecting the Anglocentric bias of much work in the field of multilingualism studies today (as well as the highly problematic status of English in a global educational context). Many of these blind spots are representative of the field, signalling the need for much more work to be done within literary multilingualism studies and, we hope, within the pages of this journal.

We are still testing the dimensions of our own field of study, searching for the tools to examine it. It is not surprising, then, that this issue does not present a clear message regarding the terminology we should use when examining multilingual texts, though we do see some tendencies that might in the future direct the field into a more settled conceptual framework. The two dominant terms—‘multilingual’ and ‘translingual’—are by no means universally accepted: A lot of pressure has been put on them in recent years, with alternative terminologies and further differentiations regularly suggested by scholars—think of notions such as “heterolingualism” (Grutman) and “semiodiversity,” as opposed to “glossodiversity” (Gramling, making use of Halliday’s vocabulary), of differences such as “hard” and “soft” (Noorani), “weak” and “strong” (Lennon) or “manifest” and “latent” multilingualism (Radaelli). The uncertain parameters within which we are working have led to what Helgesson describes in his article as a “bewildering proliferation of terms”—one that is in danger of causing further confusion. We might also add, however, that this terminological restlessness and uncertainty is testament to the still-young, still-dynamic nature of the field.

There is, moreover, something of a divide between the scholarly traditions that do choose to retain the terms ‘multilingualism’ and ‘translingualism’ respectively. We generally associate ‘multilingualism’ with text-oriented approaches, and ‘translingualism’ with production-oriented approaches, but of course the two cannot be separated so easily. Translingualism, or the fact that authors have competencies in various idioms and more or less habitually trans-

gress the boundaries between them, is usually discussed with regard to texts. Likewise, the study of linguistic diversity in literary texts cannot be viewed without considering the authors' linguistic repertoires (and the biographical reasons for their particular linguistic competence). But the questions asked in the two areas of scholarship tend to differ. Scholarship starting out from the perspective of authorship is inclined to focus on lived experience, while text-centred approaches are more open to 'aesthetic' questions; 'translingualism' research often ties itself to speaker-centred research in linguistics, whereas 'multilingualism' research is more interested in individual texts' (aesthetic) singularity or even exceptionality. These tendencies produce perspectives on linguistic diversity that are engaged in a lively dialogue, but some of the articles in this issue provide yet another way forward, through their focus not on the author or the text but on the *reader*.

Helgesson suggests one way of moving on from "an aporia in the discourse on multilingualism and translingualism" by introducing the concept of "regimes of comprehensibility." For Grutman, meanwhile, the *reading and reception* of linguistic diversity is a "missing link" in literary multilingualism studies. Both contributions suggest developing models that describe how reception contributes to *producing* linguistic diversity (even if this may sound paradoxical). Grutman describes how the particular use of linguistic diversity in a text implies "Model Readers" (Eco) with different linguistic competencies and indicates how they are to deal with (potentially) incomprehensible language. Limits of comprehensibility are also central to Helgesson's concept that situates literature's ways of engaging "lingualism" (according to Robert Stockhammer: the "relationship" of a text "to specific idioms") before the background of politics and ideologies of language use. The suggestion here is to speak of "regimes" that largely influence or even determine how limits of comprehensibility can be put into play. And in her article on the "post-monolingual anglophone novel," Neumann argues along similar lines when she insists that comprehension is not necessarily the aim when literary texts make use of linguistic diversity. She reminds us that engaging with incomprehensibility can lead to a new form of "humble reading" (Figlerowicz and Figlerowicz) that acknowledges "opacity" (Glissant). However different these approaches may be, they have an important point in common: They develop a new perspective on how literature relates to linguistic diversity. This means that both the actual production and the actual shape of texts, that is, the objects of scholarly interest in translingualism and multilingualism studies, ultimately depend on structures of reception.

Translingualism and multilingualism scholarship both share a scepticism towards the "monolingual paradigm" (Yildiz) and towards the conceptualization of linguistic diversity as a mere multiplication of 'monolingualisms.' All

the articles in this volume share that scepticism. As Grønlie demonstrates in his reading of Pound, multilingual writing that aims to separate the different languages it makes use of can be qualified as reactionary and even openly racist. Multilingualism is messy and infinitely varied, and as Grutman reminds us, we need to resist terms that seek to “introduce order into perceived disorder” in the name of maintaining monolingual norms. Bilingualism is one example of such a concept in so far as it can imply ‘mastery’ or ‘native command’ of two languages which thereby are implicitly defined as unities to be kept in their respective boxes.

A theoretical alternative to such thinking may be seen in translanguaging theory within the field of linguistics. This approach moves away from conceiving of language and language use in terms of distinct named languages. Instead, translanguaging provides a model of multilingualism whereby individuals are seen to draw on their communicative repertoires in fluid and dynamic ways without being restricted by the boundaries between named languages. The idea has had some recent influence within literary multilingualism studies, as can be seen in this very issue (see the articles by Gilmour, Helgesson and Neumann). Nonetheless, there is potential for terminological confusion: ‘Translingual’ is the adjective used by linguistics scholars to express ‘unbounded’ language use, whereas in literary studies, it is often used to designate a speaker of at least two ‘bounded’ languages. Translingualism scholars in particular tend to refer to individual idioms in a manner that seems to treat them as clear-cut and separate entities (L1, L2, etc.), even though, of course, their ultimate aim is usually to demonstrate the ways that literary writing potentially transgresses these entities. Helgesson’s concept of “regimes of comprehensibility” promises a way beyond the binary of conceiving languages as either ‘bounded’ or ‘unbounded’ by acknowledging “the gravitational pull of specific languages” alongside the complex “linguistic constellations” at stake in actual language use. After all, when speaking, we pick our words with regard to the context, the addressees and our very individualized and diversified linguistic competencies, rather than paying attention to the constraints of *one* language system (or several *ones*). This also means that the very difference between mono- and multilingualism may ultimately be deceptive.

Last, but not least, all contributions to this issue are highly aware of how language hierarchies and ideologies impact literature. We may well now be living in a ‘postmonolingual’ state characterised by a powerful push and pull between the monolingual paradigm and the actual lived experiences of languages in a globalised world, but, as Gilmour reminds us, our higher education institutions are still governed by that paradigm—and, we might add, our schools and our publishing institutions are as well. It is no surprise that some

of the most important work in the recent wave of multilingualism studies has devoted its attention to examining the monolingual paradigm: Yildiz's critique of European ideologies of the 'mother tongue' and Gramling's systematic examination of the 'invention' of monolingualism as a powerful ideological formation are notably present in the articles of this issue.

Grutman critiques "the monolingual bias of literary history" whereby "shared monolingualism" is the assumed norm; indeed, most literary study still defines literature by language and nation and judges literary 'value' against the 'norms' of 'national languages' and 'national literatures.' Selimović argues that we need to "[reimagine] the established nation-bound formulation of literatures and languages," not least because "[a] myriad of linguistic complexities and histories are ironed out when we name languages and literatures or, worse, exclude them altogether." She points out that literary multilingualism research has focused predominantly on work in English, French, German and Spanish. "In its neglect of minoritized languages," she argues, "the critical field of literary multilingualism risks perpetuating [racialized linguistic] hierarchies." Her essay shows us that the perception of and engagement with multilingualism is subject to racial and social politics that present certain languages as more 'worthy' than others—a point that is also made by Gilmour. Grønlie's article also tackles the relationship between multilingualism and race head on, but this time demonstrating the ways that Pound's "collage-like" juxtaposition of languages parallels his segregationist beliefs and antisemitism. Multilingual poetry, Grønlie concludes, "need not be only a cosmopolitan celebration of cultural and linguistic difference but may just as well be intimately linked to racist ideas." We are reminded that literary multilingualism cannot in itself count as politically 'progressive' and that we have to be careful when making judgment: We should neither vilify monolingualism nor celebrate multilingualism without question.

In short, literary multilingualism scholars must work against, critique and challenge the very disciplinary and ideological parameters that have formed them. As Gilmour asks: "What do we need to do to think our field differently?" How can we "bridge the distance between the whole continuum of multilingual experience in language practices on the ground, and particular models of language and multilingualism driven by academic disciplinarity, institutionalization, and the logic of global publishing"? But to work against the very parameters of our disciplines and our institutions may be easier said than done: In Europe, for example, literary studies is in many ways unthinkable without the efforts of centuries to standardise the former vernaculars of medieval Europe that became the object and the instrument of scholarly work in the humanities. We need standardized vocabularies and modes of expression to do

what we are supposed to do: provide descriptions and critiques of texts and societal structures that are not only valid but also comprehensible in the way they are presented. The seemingly paradoxical tendency of multilingualism studies (both in literature and linguistics) to confine itself to the use of English (and to reading English scholarship only) thus finds an explanation—though certainly no legitimacy. It is certainly convenient for everyone to use the same terminology, unimpeded by the fuzziness introduced by the different “Weltansichten” (Wilhelm von Humboldt) inherent to different idioms. Still, given the intuition, common to the field, that “semiodiversity” in Gramling’s sense is both epistemologically enriching and potentially a means to overcome the ideological shortcomings of monolingualism, one future task for the field will be, at least from our point of view, to challenge this monolingual standardisation of language in scholarship. We must try to understand and test how far we can push against the seemingly unavoidable constraints of a unified meta-language of scholarship.

We very much hope that the discussions and questions raised in this first issue of the *Journal of Literary Multilingualism* will be continued in the coming issues. With this in mind, we will be editing an ongoing forum within the journal, entitled “Reflections and Debates in Literary Multilingualism Studies.” The forum will provide the opportunity for more informal and dynamic debates in the field, for consolidating current knowledge and reflecting on the state of the field and its future. We also hope to facilitate debates and responses to recent research. Forum contributions will be short pieces written in an accessible style and in a range of formats, which may include single-authored position papers, responses to recent articles or special issues in the *Journal of Literary Multilingualism*, dialogues between scholars, or multiple-authored pieces such as roundtable discussions. We invite all interested scholars to contact us with ideas for contributions and discussion.



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The Missing Link: Modeling Readers of Multilingual Writing

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Abstract

This contribution tries to fill the gap concerning the place and role of readers in multilingual studies by focusing on the ways in which multilingual texts both do and do not create multilingual readers. Three scenarios are illustrated with two examples each. So-called ‘shared multilingualism’ implies bilingual competence (and excludes monolingual readers) by juxtaposing languages with little overlap. Other texts exhibit more than one language yet construct a monolingual reader, while others still reward bilingual competence and at the same time accommodate monolingual incompetence.

Keywords

bilingualism and literature – multilingualism in literature – multilingual writing – reader-oriented criticism – Model Reader

1 Blind Spots in Reader-Oriented Criticism

The expression ‘missing link’ was originally coined in the context of Darwin’s theory of evolution but has long since entered general usage. According to one dictionary (*Collins*), it designates a “piece of information or evidence” that is needed “in order to make [our] knowledge or understanding of something

complete.¹ The following pages will seek to address one such “piece of information” that seems to be missing from the broader picture. Comparatively speaking, multilingual texts and their authors have received much more attention than their readers, whether those be real or intended, targeted explicitly or only programmed implicitly by texts displaying several languages.

One might have expected the different strands of scholarship that go under the umbrella term ‘reader-oriented criticism’ to yield relevant results. Not so. None of the clever “essays on audience and interpretation” collected by Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman in *The Reader in the Text* (1980), for instance, looks at languages beyond the matter of language. Naomi Schor arguably comes closest when she discusses Franz Kafka’s *Trial* (*Der Proceß*, 1925). In that novel’s chapter “Im Dom” (In the cathedral), K. meets an Italian business connection and is supposed to take him on a tour of the town. Italian grammar is mentioned, but the German text contains not a single word of Italian. K. studied Italian yet fails to understand the man. In Schor’s argument, Italian becomes but one in a series of “enigmatic” sign systems that come “equipped with [their] own failure device” (1980: 178).

Reader-oriented criticism is mostly interested in language as a tool of communication. “In devising a model of interaction between text and reader, Wolfgang Iser admits to his critics, I have tried to conceptualize—in the idealized manner which is fundamental to model-building—basic acts of communication” (Iser, Holland, and Booth, 1980: 73). One of those critics is Stanley Fish, whose “informed reader” is “a competent speaker of the [single] language out of which the text is built up”; his “semantic knowledge” includes “lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects” (1970: 145, quoted in Iser 1978: 31)—of the language in question, that is, not of foreign tongues. Similarly, when Umberto Eco (2011: 36) speaks of “possible linguistic choices,” he means semantic and stylistic choices within a given language, not between different languages: “every type of text explicitly selects a very general model of possible reader through the choice (i) of a specific linguistic code,² (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) [...] a specific encyclopedic competence” (1979a: 7). Though multilingual himself, Eco did not build linguistic diversity into his model. While language as *linguaggio* looms large in Eco’s *Encyclopedica*, individual languages (*lingue*) do not.

1 <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/missing-link>. Accessed October 11, 2022.

2 The Italian edition is more explicit: “la scelta di una lingua (che esclude ovviamente chi non la parla), la scelta di un tipo di enciclopedia [...], la scelta di un dato patrimonio lessicale e stilistico...” (Eco 1979b: 55).

German scholars also failed to question the monolingual bias of literary studies, even when “challenging literary history” (Jauss, 1970). For them as well, “a text written in a foreign language” constitutes an “extreme case”: “if the language, i.e., the linguistic convention, is not known, the text in question remains unreadable” (Rothe, 1978: 101). This seems logical but turns out to be far from universal. Readers can make sense out of nonsense (we will shortly see how an Italian reader can actually see Italian in purportedly nonsensical poetry) or, conversely, nonsense out of sense, as in so-called sound translation.³ Nor does Rothe’s statement account for the pedagogical uses of reading in an acquired language (Eder, 2009: 37–55).

Are we supposed to believe that literary communication always happens in one language? Is shared monolingualism really the only scenario? What about shared or symmetrical multilingualism, where writers and readers have access to the same variety of languages? And what about non-shared or asymmetrical multilingualism? The latter comes in two different guises: As Julia Tidigs and Markus Huss (2017: 211) remind us, some real-life “readers may read even an apparently monolingual text as a multilingual one,” as in the “multilingual philology” advocated by Till Dembeck (2018b), “while others read a multilingual text as a monolingual one.” (Tidigs and Huss 2017: 211)

No single article can pretend to address all the relevant questions raised by these four possibilities, let alone provide all the answers. For lack of space, not of interest, I will focus on the ways in which multilingual texts both do and do not program multilingual skills on behalf of their readership. The latter, admittedly, is an ‘ideal-type’ in the Weberian sense, that is, not a normative ideal of perfection but a conceptual construct that aims at providing a coherent perspective on the object under study by stressing its most representative and therefore ‘ideal-typical’ properties.

This is not meant to give short shrift to the diversity of readers in real life. Each of them (and of us) “reacts to and interacts differently with the languages of the text” (Tidigs and Huss, 2017: 211). So-called “empirical” readers “can read in many ways” and are not beholden to a text, which they may use “as a vehicle for their own passions”⁴ (Eco, 2011: 41–43). Their individual reactions are too numerous and too unpredictable, however, to be factored in in a theoretical model other than by applying the *ceteris paribus* principle and focusing on one

3 Think of the hilarious collection of *Mots d’Heures: Gousses, Rames* (Mother goose rhymes), published in 1967 by Luis d’Antin van Rooten. For more on sound translation, see Dembeck (2015) and Broqua and Weissmann (2019).

4 Eco (1979a: 8, 140–41; 1979b: 57) gives the example of Eugene Sue’s *Mystères de Paris* (1842–43) which were spectacularly ‘misread’ by the people Sue thought he was writing *about*, not *for*.

variable, that is, the programmed effect on the reader “implied” (Booth) by the text and abstracted as ‘ideal-typical’ by the researcher.

The best (and perhaps only) way to document individual attitudes is by preparing surveys after confronting actual readers with multilingual writing, like Amanda Murphy (2019) did. Setting up and analyzing questionnaires is, however, extremely time-consuming and fraught with methodological difficulties that may hamper the extrapolation of results beyond the sample surveyed. The more opinions the merrier, certainly, but *quot capita, tot sententiae*: empirical research has shown there to be very little overlap between individual reading experiences. As Norman Holland, the foremost American exponent of such research, put it to Iser:

If we leave readers on their own, [...] we find little or no commonality in what [they] report about their responses to literature. To be sure, if we insist on a certain way of reading, as by a final examination in a course, a critical journal’s requirements, or a psychologist’s questionnaire, we do find similar phrasings in responses, but then, obviously, the similarities stem not from the text but from the reader’s consenting to the constraints we added. Left to their own desires, [readers] have such variable experiences [that] it seems futile to think in terms of a core of limit to response set by the text.

ISER, HOLLAND, and BOOTH, 1980: 58–59

Once we acknowledge, with Holland, that “differences in [empirical] literary responses to a given text are far more essential than the similarities” (1980: 59), we may decide to cast off text-based research. Doing so without surveying other real-life readers, however, condemns us to fall back on our own (assumptions regarding) language skills, a bit like linguists traditionally used themselves as so-called native informants, relying on their intuitions regarding a particular language.

Hence my continuing interest in the formal modeling of hermeneutics. My emphasis will remain on texts as molds of potential reader profiles, rather than springboards of actual reader’s experiences. Notwithstanding the blind spots regarding language(s) in reader-oriented criticism, dismissing this tradition of research seems a bit like throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The preceding *pars destruens* will thus be suitably followed by a *pars construens*.

2 Multilingual Texts and Their Model Readers

I will start from Walker Gibson’s very early proposal to create notions that mirror the difference “between the author of a literary work of art and the fictitious speaker within the work of art” (1950: 265). At one end of the divide, Gibson

places “the ‘real’ individual upon whose crossed knees rests the open volume”; on the other we find “the fictitious reader [...] whose mask and costume the individual takes on in order to experience the language.” Gibson (1950: 266) calls the latter a “mock reader” because it is an “artifact, controlled, simplified, abstracted out of the chaos of day-to-day sensation”. His idea foreshadows critics like Iser (1978) or Eco (1979a, 1979b), both of whom stressed the textual nature of their “*implizite Leser*” or “*Lettore Modello*.” Iser saw the *act* of reading as a way of processing texts, while Eco emphasized the reading *pact*, which he described in terms of “narrative cooperation.” (1979b)

Much like Gibson’s mock reader, Eco’s “Model Reader” is the abstract result of a “textual strategy” (Eco, 1979a: 7, 10–11; 1979b: 60–62 [3,5]). Eco sees a text as “a device conceived in order to produce its Model Reader” (2011: 40), using the word “model,” not as an adjective meaning ‘exemplary,’ as something to be copied, but as an epithetical noun qualifying another noun. Like model planes, model readers are constructions, except that they are not modeled after texts but by texts, in the course of the reading process. Their abstract character by no means precludes them from having a profile, in terms of age or sex, culture and literacy, social wherewithal and general worldliness.

All of this is subsumed under the heading of Eco’s “encyclopedic competence,” the sum of which cannot be matched by any real human being. To illustrate this point, Eco (1979b: 58; 2011: 36) was fond of quoting James Joyce, who pictured “an ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia” for *Finnegans Wake* (1939, FW 120: 13–14). Having a lot of time on one’s hands is only the first requirement, of course; it also helps to know English—as well as other languages. Considering how famous Joyce’s last novel is for mobilizing myriad languages (Milesi, 1985; Attridge, 1988: 195–209; Taylor-Batty, 2013: 33–37; Dembeck, 2021), it is nothing short of stunning that Eco pays no heed to this feature, of which he must have been cognizant.

Another instance of Eco touching upon our topic without engaging with it can be found in his early work, where he looks at “Das große Lalula,” a nonsense poem by Christian Morgenstern (1938 [1905]):

Kroklowafzi? Semmememmi!
Seiokrontro—praffliplo.
Bifzi, bafzi; hulalemmei...
quasti basti bo... [*sic*]

Morgenstern “did not refer to any existing code” according to Eco (1979a: 15; 1979b: 71–73). Yet the Italian edition of *Lector in Fabula* ironically (and unwittingly) proves the opposite through a series of Freudian slips. Whether they

were Eco's own, or his editor's at Bompiani, we shall never know. The fact remains that "Seiokrontro" is misspelled in Italian as "Seikronto," which comes eerily close to *Sei pronto?* (Italian for 'Are you ready?'), and "quasti basti bo" becomes "quasti besti ho" (Eco, 1979b: 71). Adding a verb (*ho* is the first person singular of *avere*) turns this line into something that edges toward an Italian sentence (*queste bestie ho*, i.e., 'I have these beasts/animals'). Despite this not really making sense, it does say a lot about the suggestive powers of natural languages, and unexpectedly illustrates Eco's point that we are wont to apply "a given code or system of codes" and "transform" any utterance "into the first levels of content" (Eco, 1979a: 15).

Before looking at other examples, a few things are worth pointing out, at the risk of stating the obvious. First, very few texts deal with foreign languages in a qualitatively consistent manner. The likeliness of this happening is inversely proportional with the length of the text in question: Foregrounding another language in one way only is easier, after all, in a fourteen-line sonnet than in a fourteen-hundred-page novel like *War and Peace*. Longer texts will almost certainly combine several scenarios. At the same time, I have often found that one scenario stands out as an overarching trend, showcasing a preferred way of dealing with languages in a particular text. In this sense, even if few texts perfectly fit the categories I will be proposing, they do belong to one category rather than another. *Mutatis mutandis*, this is akin to the "poetic function," which Roman Jakobson did not see as the only device available to "verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent" (1987 [1960]: 69). With that important caveat, each text can still be housed in a category without being pigeonholed.

Second, it is rare for equal prominence to be given to two (or more) languages. More often than not, foreign-language material is inserted or 'embedded' into the text's 'matrix language' (as per sociolinguistic terminology developed by Myers-Scotton, 1992). In narrative genres in particular, this is much more common than attempts at creating a balanced situation. Christine Brooke-Rose's dazzling novel *Between* (1968) bounces between English, German, and French (with a liberal sprinkling of Italian, Catalan, Turkish, ancient Latin and modern Greek) for almost two hundred pages, but it unmistakably starts and ends in English, thereby putting the other languages between brackets: "Between the enormous wings the body of the plane stretches its one hundred and twenty seats. [...] Between the enormous wings the body floats" (1986: 395, 575).

Hence my suggestion, some years ago, to speak of "heterolingualism" (Grutman, 1996: 71–75, 2006: 18–20) instead of 'multilingualism' (which refers to a multitude of languages but without acknowledging the existence of hierarchies) and in particular, 'bilingualism,' a word that has been put to far too many

uses. Indeed, what do bilingual people have in common with bilingual meetings (between potentially monolingual parties), bilingual countries (comprising of potentially monolingual regions) with bilingual dictionaries or commercial packaging in several languages? In all but the first of these examples, languages are kept separate, locked up in their respective space. They furthermore juxtapose 'equivalent' versions and purportedly say the same thing twice. Signifiers belonging to two linguistic codes cancel each other out in mirror images, a situation that results in "double monolingualism" (Grutman, 1993: 210). Another drawback of the common term 'bilingualism' is that it carries overtones of 'balance' and 'perfect mastery.' It implicitly seeks to organize, to introduce order into perceived disorder, and, ultimately, to have twin homogeneity triumph over heterogeneity and hybridity, fusion and confusion, any and all configurations where 'linguistic difference' is not a convenient commodity, easily identified and assigned, but the semiotic index of deep-rooted diversity.

Third, the actual quantity of foregrounded linguistic material varies greatly. It is a matter not merely of dosage but also of effect and impact. This may sound counterintuitive, as impact seems to depend on dosage. Not necessarily so, in fact. While a large helping of languages almost certainly (dis)orients readers, the opposite is also true: A few foreign words can resonate throughout a text. A short Spanish title (*El desdichado*, 1853) borrowed from Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) was enough for Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval to conjure up exotic landscapes and valiant knights. Victor Hugo had also initially used Spanish for the subtitle of his play *Hernani* (1830): *tres para una* (three for one) alluded to the love predicament of leading lady Doña Sol. The subtitle was eventually discarded because it smacked of comedy and made light of the play's political plot, charting *Hernani*/Don Carlos's accession to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. But Hugo hid another coded reference in his text, this time using Latin for the watchword used by his conspirators in Act IV: *ad augusta per angusta* ('to high places by narrow roads,' meaning metaphorically 'to honors through difficulties').

3 Symmetrical Multilingualism and the Multilingual Model Reader

Hugo did not translate the Spanish subtitle or the Latin watchword, though both revealed part of his plot. In that sense, he took for granted the linguistic acumen of his audience. He not only expected them to be complicit in 'the battle of *Hernani*' (as the episode is known in French literary history); he also wanted them, ideally, to admire and share his knowledge of languages.

Of the scenarios outlined in these pages, this is the one that has attracted most attention. Critics often assume a shared language repertoire, if not always

between actual authors and their 'real' readers,⁵ at least between the ways in which they both are implied by a text. As we will see shortly, this is not always true, even in terms of abstract (Model or Implied) readers, but it is obviously a possible scenario. Some authors do seem to want their readers to be on the same page, so to speak. An important indication thereof is the fact that they assign specific functions to the languages embedded in their texts.

Right in the middle of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924) for instance, a key conversation takes place in French between a German (Hans Castorp) and a Russian character (Clawdia Chauchat). Mann did not provide any translation for the benefit of empirical readers with no passive knowledge of French. That skill is, however, required from the encoded model reader, who can tell that more is at stake. First, neither character is a native speaker of French, which serves as a middle ground and indeed as a meeting ground. Second, as a clichéd symbol of eroticism for foreigners ('French kisses' and 'French letters' are English expressions, after all, which no more exist in French than 'French bread' does), the language of love is a *persona*, a mask that allows Hans Castorp to shed his inhibitions and express himself more freely than he would have in his native German.

Astute actual readers with little linguistic knowledge but sufficient baggage could have figured out as much, one might argue. Perhaps, provided they are well-versed in cultural clichés. But more is required of the novel's Model Reader, whom the text wants to have some knowledge of conversational French.

Expectations are arguably higher in *War and Peace* (*Война и мир*, 1869, transliterated as *Voyna i mir*), Leo Tolstoy's huge historical novel set during the Napoleonic campaigns of the early nineteenth century. As has been abundantly documented, this brick of a book contains a substantial number of French words. Their impact is most felt in the first part. *Voyna i mir* actually starts out in French in the original Russian edition, an intrusion that is spectacularly highlighted by the constant switching between the Roman alphabet (for French) and Cyrillic characters (for Russian).

5 Some have. In his landmark lectures on multilingualism in literature, Leonard Forster, while discussing a medieval poem in Provençal and Genoese that stages an amorous debate, deemed "the two dialects [...] to be mutually comprehensible to the speakers—and *of course* to the poet's audience" (1970: 12–13; emphasis added). He has been taken to task for taking shortcuts like this (most notably by Baetens Beardsmore 1978: 93–94), but his efforts must be put into context. A specialist of the European Renaissance, Forster was well-positioned to question the monolingual bias in literary scholarship.

Even in Tolstoy's day, the sheer quantity of untranslated French was an issue, as French was an opaque language for most Russians—hence his publisher's decision to replace all French passages with Russian translations in subsequent editions. (They would be reinstated in the so-called definitive edition, and the Russian relegated to footnotes.) The book's Model Reader is of course transformed in the process. The original novel required encyclopedic competences that included (passive) knowledge of foreign languages (the less conspicuous presence of German is often overlooked in Tolstoy criticism), in addition to a more than average familiarity with European history and politics. So much is implied by the absence of translations and the buffer or cushion they create between the embedded 'international languages' and the 'national' matrix language.

The effects of French in *Voyna i mir* are manifold. At first, readers will be struck by the lighthearted tone of much French conversation, which may seem mere banter and social gossip. For instance, when Anna Pavlovna (first lady-in-waiting to empress consort Maria Feodorovna) berates Prince Vassily for failing to appreciate his sons, he answers in French, using the then-fashionable terminology of physiognomy: "Que voulez-vous? Lavater aurait dit que je n'ai pas la bosse de la paternité." Upon which Anna Pavlovna retorts in Russian: "Stop joking. I wanted to talk seriously with you." What exactly the prince said seems less important than how he said it, that is, the fact that he spoke French. Consequently, the content of his answer can be dismissed by Anna Pavlovna as "a simple *boutade*" (Eco, 2001: 19).

I quote this passage via one of Eco's lectures, where he concludes that "even a reader who does not understand a single French word can guess what is going on." According to him, "the Model Reader of these pages (in every possible translation) should at least realize that the French sentences are in French" and "that these characters talked in French for reasons of snobbery" (2001: 20). That, however, is but a minimal requirement. As Eco stresses as well, Tolstoy went beyond reminding his contemporaries that Russian aristocrats enjoyed speaking French (which hardly set them apart from their peers in other European monarchies). More importantly, this habit of theirs created a political tension, as they continued to cherish the French language even while their country was at war with Napoleon (whom Tolstoy's noblemen and women typically refer to in the novel by his Italian surname, 'Buonaparte,' as a way of underscoring his status as an upstart and usurper of thrones, rather than a legitimate emperor). This subtext explains the divided loyalties of some of the novel's main characters. Gossip and snobbery, then, are like varnish on deeper layers of paint. Far from simply playing to the gallery, French dialogue plays a structuring role in Tolstoy's novel (Uspensky, 1973: 46–56; Grutman, 2019: 169–73; Hansen, 2019: 615–18).

4 Excursus: Two Model Readers

Toward the end of his book on *The Role of the Reader/Lector in Fabula* (Eco, 1979a: 220–60; 1979b: 194–225), Eco analyzed in much detail a nineteenth-century short story—“Un drame bien parisien” (1890) by Alphonse Allais—that he claimed could be “read in two different ways, a naive way and a critical way,” with “both types of readers [being] inscribed within the textual strategy. The naive reader,” Eco went on to say, “will be unable to enjoy the Story (he will suffer a final uneasiness), but the critical reader will succeed only by enjoying the defeat of the former” (1979a: 10).

Two decades later, when revisiting this idea in *Sulla letteratura/On Literature*, Eco speaks of a “double Model Reader.” Alongside a “semantic reader” who simply wants to know how the story will end, he mentions a “semiotic or aesthetic reader, who asks himself what kind of reader that particular story was asking him to become” and “wants to know how what happens has been narrated” (2002: 238–9; 2005: 222–3). This second Model Reader must moreover be triggered for a text to have “two or more levels of meaning” (2002: 240–1; 2005: 224–5). Consequently, “there is no such thing as an exclusively second-level model reader; on the contrary, in order to become one, you have to have been a good first-level reader” (2005: 223).

As can be gathered from these quotations, Eco established a hierarchy between both readers. In 1979, the “critical reader” boldly went where no “naïve reader” had gone before. There was even a hint of Schadenfreude as he “enjoyed” seeing the latter throw in the towel. By 2002, the “semantic reader” had become something of a stepping stone, an initial stage, the chrysalis whence the butterfly of the “semiotic or aesthetic reader” could emerge. A major difference, I submit, is that the more recent formulation stresses how both Model Readers can be, and in fact often are, combined in the same Empirical Reader, who shifts into a higher hermeneutic gear, as it were.

5 Cosmetic Multilingualism and the Monolingual Model Reader

Not all texts overstep the language limits of their Empirical Readers by creating a multilingual Model Reader. In a landmark article, Meir Sternberg (1981: 226) opposes “the uncompromising demands of unique dialogue” (as in *Voyna i mir*) or “esoteric quotation” (as notoriously happens in the final climax of Eliot’s *Waste Land*; more on this topic soon) on the one hand, and “the minimal reproductive gesture of mimetic cliché”—as when using interjections like French *Parbleu!*, English *Damn!* or German *Donnerwetter!*—on the other hand. These “ready-

made locutions” are examples of what Sternberg calls the “selective reproduction” of multi-language exchanges in the fictional universe. It “does not necessarily require or presuppose bilingual competence on the reader’s part, certainly not beyond a minimal standard and not to an equal degree in all periods and genres” (1981: 226). Nor is it merely a matter of quantity: Textual embedding plays a role as well. Sternberg speaks in this respect “of intratextual ‘dual-language’ rendition” (226), a phenomenon we will shortly encounter in the guise of ‘cushioning.’

Minimizing the impact of other languages makes sense from a market point of view. Potential buyers—which publishers for some reason tend to picture as being monolingual—are not deterred by ‘mimetic clichés’: Witness their presence in popular genres such as science fiction and fantasy, spy and detective novels. More surprising and disturbing is to see the trend develop in postcolonial or migrant writing, areas once known for their linguistic richness. Hence Anjali Pandey’s (2016: 83) label of “linguistic exhibitionism” for “the deliberate use of modern multilingualism for cosmetic effect,” a recent and in her view “shallower” type of multilingualism, in contrast with the “deeper” forms used by postcolonial writers from the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The market-driven nature of today’s multicultural writing is apparent in *On Borrowed Words* (2001), Ilan Stavans’s memoir documenting his personal journey from Mexico to Israel to the United States. Initial plans for the book involved “drafting each of the chapters [...] in the tongue in which [Stavans] experienced the relevant phase of [his] life, but that plan was obviously unpractical” (Stavans, 2016). In the end, he gave in to pressure from his editor at Viking, who laughed at the idea and reminded him that he “had signed up to write a memoir in English.” *On Borrowed Words* is thus appropriately subtitled *A Memoir of Language*, as opposed to ‘languages’ in the plural. Stavans did, however, “give [his] English a variety of accents” to convey “the impression that something was awkward, slightly amiss—that the lens through which” American readers saw his odyssey “was somewhat warped.” When writing in English “about the *Yidishe Schule in Mexike*” where he studied as a child, for instance, he “used a Yiddish cadence.” English nevertheless forms the book’s linguistic spine and core. Stavans’s other languages (Spanish, Yiddish, Hebrew) are only sampled and generally served with a generous side of English so as not to disturb the targeted (coveted?) Anglo-American audience.

My second example comes from Italy, where the Algerian-born novelist Amara Lakhous has pursued a bilingual career in Arabic and in Italian. His characters often find themselves shifting linguistic and cultural gears as well. The protagonist of the novel that put him on Italy’s literary map in 2006, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (*Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*), is an Algerian translator who speaks Italian without a

traceable accent and can therefore pass as a local. Lakhous's project is clearly multi- or intercultural, yet he shies away from foregrounding languages. His book appeared in separate Arabic and Italian editions, which addressed distinctly different audiences. His Model Reader, moreover, is strictly monolingual, much more so even than was the case with Stavans. The Arabic original of *Scontro di civiltà* appeared in Algeria and uses a few 'mimetic clichés' (*guaglio*, *signora*, *ciao*, *cazzo*, *amore*; see Lusetti, 2017: 114–6) to remind readers that the novel is set in Italy. The Italian self-translation similarly samples Arabic in a stereotypical fashion, to remind Italian readers that the narrator is supposed to be speaking Arabic to himself. At no point, however, do these texts require either group of readers to master (even passively) the 'other' language: An acknowledgment devoid of any actual knowledge seems sufficient.

Considering the many fascinating ways there are to combine and mix languages in fiction, *Scontro di civiltà* appears quite conventional despite its multicultural agenda. For one, heterolingualism is mostly restricted to lexicon: Readers are never confronted with actual dialogue in Arabic but only face a few isolated words, which hardly constitute a stumbling block. Even in the chapter that contains most Arab words, we find only thirteen types and thirty-seven tokens or occurrences. The list is as follows, in order of appearance: couscous (four times), Ramadan (four times), muezzin (once), *buraq* (once), *qalb alluz* (once), *zlabia* (once), *harira* (once), *maqroun* (once), *suhur* (once), *dhakar* (fifteen times), *zagharid* (six times), and *marbout* (once). The first three refer to well-known cultural realities (hence the lack of italics), and Lakhous (2006: 117–22; 2008: 118–23) glosses the last four. The remaining five items may well reinforce the text's exotic aura, but their intercultural impact is further limited by the translations provided (for four types totaling twenty-three out of thirty-seven tokens), which create a buffer or comfort zone for those unwilling or unable to read foreign words.

Showcasing diversity by dressing up texts to make them look multilingual does not call for a bilingual Model Reader. Such "cushioning" (Zabus, 2007: 175–92) of foreign words reduces them to exotic commodities and fails to question the power differential between the matrix language and the embedded codes: "the forceful proximity of both items represents the failure to achieve cultural symbiosis or reciprocal creolization" (Zabus, 2007: 179). This is a far from ideal alternative to explanatory footnotes (of which *Scontro di civiltà* also contains a fair number), with their even less desirable aura of ethnography.

In the early days of postcolonial criticism, Kashmiri scholar Braj Kachru expected some degree of "bilingual creativity" from readers of texts that "reveal

a blend of two or more linguistic textures and literary traditions” (1987: 127). He invited them to achieve some form of “identification with the literary sensibility of the bilingual in tune with the ways of saying and the levels of new meaning” (130). Around the same time, the Egyptian critic Samia Mehrez (1991: 260) welcomed the “subversive poetics” of using Arabic alongside French in a way that suggests ongoing mutual interaction, as in the “radical bilingualism” developed by Moroccan author Abdelkebir Khatibi and his Tunisian confrere Abdelwahab Meddeb. The latter’s novel *Talismano* (1987) purportedly has two layers of text and two strata of meaning, only one of which is visible to monolingual French readers. The underlying Arabic remains hidden, shining through only sporadically. Some words are given an ethnographic explanation (*Guiddid*, “meat dried and salted”). Others appear in a hybrid form, as when Meddeb makes up the verbs *médiner* or *en-khol-er*, derived respectively from *medina* (the old Arab core of North African cities) and the dark make-up known as *khol* (all examples taken from Khatibi 1983: 194; 2019: 129). More profoundly, Meddeb’s French syntax is reminiscent of the rhythms of vernacular Arabic or the hum of Koranic recitation. Last but not least, Arabic calligraphy is put to spectacular use in *Talismano*. Taken together, these features upset the novel’s “monolingual structure,” weighing it down with the “baroque shock” of Arabic poetics, according to Khatibi (1983: 197; 2019: 131).

By thus subverting linguistic hierarchies, Khatibi and Meddeb impose “challenging requirements in order for the reader, Western or otherwise, to decode their texts. Their radical bilingualism demands that Western-specific models and standards be rewritten to accommodate their own linguistic and cultural experiences as colonial/postcolonial subjects” (Mehrez, 1991: 260). Yet at the same time, Mehrez saw a major hurdle ahead: “until we can form readers who can decode such texts, this radical bilingualism can easily become yet another constraint, in which the writer will remain on the margins of literary institutions” (1991: 260). This challenge has nothing to do with the ways in which North African writers embed Arabic in their French, but has everything to do with the status of the languages involved. Chantal Zabus similarly observed in 1991 that the time had “not yet come” when African authors who make a name for themselves in European languages would be “able to insert an African word or refer to an African cultural event in the same manner in which a French writer can throw [in] German, English or Latin” (2007 [1991]: 182).

One need only think of T. S. Eliot’s polyglot pyrotechnics in *The Waste Land* (1922) to see how much separates postcolonial language struggles from imperial language games:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam ceu chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
 Shantih shantih shantih.

2001: 19–20

The poem's final 'fragments' manage to reference Dante's medieval Italian, the Latin of late antiquity, hybridized with Greek, and French (Eliot quotes from the already mentioned sonnet by Nerval, *El desdichado*). Together, they echo the four languages at play in Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedie* (c. 1592), where Hieronymo (who "is mad again") asks each player to "act his parte / In unknowne languages, / That it may breed the more varietie": Latin, Greek, Italian, and "courtly French" (Eliot, 2001: 65). In both the Elizabethan play and the high modernist poem, 'confusion' is created intentionally, but Eliot takes this logic one step further by lifting lines in Sanskrit from the ancient *Upanishads* (dating from about 600 to 300 BCE).

Many more untranslated lines (borrowed from Baudelaire, Verlaine, Wagner, as well as less high-brow references) adorn his poem and contribute in no small measure to its hermetic character. The encyclopedia constructed by this text is out of reach for almost all empirical or real-life readers, including its very author, who cannot recall all the references he tries to document in his footnotes and whom we know not to have been that fluent in the languages of modern Europe so eagerly put on display. Not that this really matters, since the poem's implied author and reader do master these references and languages.

Eliot set the bar very high indeed, and he did so on purpose. The empirical reader's non-understanding was part of the plan in this highly asymmetrical scenario. Ironically, on account of *The Waste Land* being too short to be published as a volume, copious notes were added "in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter, with the result that they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view to-day" (Eliot, 2001: 113). These notes, many of which contain translations of heterolingual material used in the body of the poem, change the profile of the Model Reader as much as Russian translations of French dialogue did in the case of Tolstoy—which did not stop Eliot from playing hide-and-seek with his actual readers. At one point he "deliberately modified a line of Dante" and subsequently revealed the ploy in his notes, "in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that

I [Eliot] meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it" (2001: 113).⁶

6 Beyond Binaries: Blended Multilingualism

Eliot's poem and two of the novels briefly discussed before, *Voyna i mir* and *Der Zauberberg*, by and large exclude monolingual readers, or leave them waiting in the anteroom of interpretation, unable to become what Eco (2005: 223) called a "second-level Model Reader." Here, overwhelming readers with languages leads to *blanket exclusion*. The opposite exists as well: *bland inclusion*, commodifying foreign languages, softening their impact through cushioning, watering them down in order to make them more palatable (as did Stavans and Lakhous in the examples above).

Not all writers are willing to enter into this binary logic (either/or), however. Some endeavor to reach both monolingual and multilingual readers, without sacrificing either category (and/and). For these writers, a third option is available, which I will call *blended multilingualism* because it does attempt to achieve some form of symbiosis.

This compromise has met with some success among postcolonial writers who find themselves stuck between two equally untenable positions. The first encourages them to forgo their heritage language and adopt the language of the (former) colonial center, in the elusive hope of being adopted by it. In doing so, however, they risk alienating readers 'back home.' Conversely, what could be gained in authenticity by writing in their native language would be lost in translation, readership, and recognition—which is why somebody like Haiti's René Depestre tries to have his cake and eat it too. In an interview with Lise Gauvin (1997: 74), Depestre likens blending languages in his texts to having "deux fers au feu" (two irons in the fire): A local tool, "bien ancré" (well anchored) in his native Creole, and a global one, which corresponds to what he calls his "nomadisme existentiel" (existential nomadism) and connects him to the rest of the French-speaking world.

Martinique's Patrick Chamoiseau is another writer from the French Caribbean (*les Antilles*) who has become well known for operating in this manner. In his award-winning novel *Texaco* (1992), he provides translations alongside reported Creole speech (so as not to alienate metropolitan readers) while care-

6 Eliot's (in)famous footnotes to *The Waste Land* are discussed by Eco (2005: 219) in connection with "intertextual irony," or rather the absence thereof, but without so much as mentioning their linguistic exuberance, a critical commonplace (Taylor-Batty, 2013: 30–32).

fully avoiding the trap of exoticism by manipulating these in-text translations. Only speakers of French-based Creoles can appreciate this maneuver, which becomes a sign of complicity, of connivance even. Chamoiseau uses Creole material as a substratum (De Souza, 1995; N’Zengou-Tayo, 1997). Though clearly framed by the French matrix language, Creole is not crushed by it. The following excerpt shows how Chamoiseau uses translation: “fouté li kan” (*foutre le camp* in French, i.e., ‘get lost’ or, more forcefully, ‘bugger off,’ or even ‘f*** off’) is replaced with much more neutral verbs (*rejoindre, descendre*):

Fouté li kan en vil, pa menyen tè ankô, fouté li kan an vil, Rejoignez l’En-ville, ne touchez plus à la terre pour personne, descendez vers l’En-ville...

CHAMOISEAU, 1992: 138

Fouté li kan en vil, pa menyen tè ankô, fouté li kan an vil, Leave for City, don’t touch the land for anyone again, leave for City ...

CHAMOISEAU, 1997: 105

There are even instances of what Zabus calls “reciprocal creolization” (2007: 179) as the less prestigious Creole bleeds into the French text: “en vil/an vil” becomes “l’En-ville” (as opposed to normative French *en ville*, meaning ‘in town’), one of *Texaco*’s master metaphors.

Creole-infused French renders Chamoiseau’s texts both transparent and opaque. Had he wished to reach mainly Caribbean readers as conversant in French and Creole as himself, his characters would have switched codes without making concessions (as did the Russian aristocrats in *Voyna i mir*). Had he decided instead to cater to monolingual metropolitan readers from France, he would have downplayed Creole, a bit like Stavans downplayed (and, in the process, downgraded) his native Yiddish and Spanish when tailoring his language memoir to the perceived preferences of the U.S. market. Chamoiseau does neither. He takes advantage of the possibilities created by mingling languages without them getting mangled in the process. His intermediate solution leaves room for two very different yet complementary reading protocols: a bilingual reading and a monolingual reading.

The impact of Creole is not buffered to the point of becoming cosmetic. Reading *Texaco* bilingually fosters a shared sense of identity (in the etymological sense of ‘sameness’) between authors and readers whose language repertoires overlap. This does not, however, happen at the expense of other readers, not conversant with the text’s embedded languages, unlike what we saw in the section about ‘symmetrical multilingualism’ (which includes Eliot’s poem before he added explanatory footnotes and translations). These ‘outsiders’ are

not left out in the cold, written out of the contract, so to speak, but are allowed to read monolingually, even if this means experiencing linguistic difference and cultural diversity by focussing on so-called exotic (and possibly clichéd) features. In the opinion of one such outsider, American critic Reed Way Dasenbrock, the “meaningfulness” of “multicultural” texts incorporating other languages (than English) “is in large measure a function of their unintelligibility for part of their audience” (1987: 12). Typical of this third scenario, then, is not the use of languages as such but rather a double reading protocol.

Blended multilingualism has achieved some prominence in particular areas, such as postcolonial and (im)migrant writing (though arguably less so than what Pandey calls “linguistic exhibitionism” [2016: 83]), yet it would be a mistake to reduce its manifestations to contested “contact zones” (Pratt, 1991). Which is why, in closing, I will briefly consider a very different example, namely Anthony Burgess’s *Clockwork Orange*. This 1962 novel cannot be associated either with the (more recent) boom in postcolonial and migrant writing, nor with any of Britain’s territorialized language minorities. In fact, Burgess (2011: 235) shows little interest in documenting actual language usage when he chooses for Alex and his “space-age hooligans,” not any existing British slang (à la *Trainspotting* avant la lettre), but “a mixture of Russian and demotic English, seasoned with rhyming slang and the gypsy’s bolo.” The name of the invented “teenage dialect” itself, Nadsat, comes from the “Russian suffix for -teen” (Burgess, 2011: 235). Around two hundred words in *A Clockwork Orange* have been linked to Russian lexicon or morphology by readers who master the language.⁷ As far as I can tell, the novel contains no actual loanwords but only Russian-infused words, that is, strange words rather than foreign words. The noun *lewdies* (as in Russian, *lyudi*: ‘people’) does not exist in English, for instance, but the adjective ‘lewd’ does. One of the novel’s key words is ‘horrorshow,’ which can be linked through interlingual paronomasia to the Russian adverb, *khorocho* (all right, nice, okay). Knowing the underlying Russian no doubt enhances one’s reading by adding a layer of meaning but it is by no means required. Needless to say, Burgess did not use Cyrillic to highlight linguistic difference. In fact, his text never identifies these heavily disguised Russian words as being Russian, nor does it label them as Nadsat, which creates a wide margin of interpretation: Where does English stop and Nadsat start, and what exactly belongs to Russian within the latter?

⁷ See Vincent and Clarke (2017). A complete list, prepared by Benet Vincent, can be found here: <https://ponyingtheslovs.wordpress.com/2017/04/20/breaking-down-nadsat-into-categories/>

Eco's second-level Model Reader might know, being ideally at ease in various varieties, both social and geographical, of English spoken in the British Isles, in addition to having access to Russian. The rest of us can enjoy the novel (or not) without language becoming an obstacle: We are provided many clues to Alex's lingo, from which, consequently, we are never really excluded. Here too, then, both a bilingual and a monolingual reading protocol is triggered by the text. Here too, "meaningfulness" and "unintelligibility" (Dasenbrock 1987: 12) go hand in hand.

Conclusion

The preceding pages use insights from reader-oriented criticism in an attempt to fill the gap in multilingual studies concerning the role of readers. This has proven to be a bit of a balancing act, since scholars involved in reader-oriented research have taken little to no notice of language variety in literature. It was not simply a matter of adopting an existing framework, in other words, but rather of adapting it to a new object of study, even of testing the possibilities (and possible limits) of a notion like Eco's "double Model Reader." This heritage nevertheless explains my emphasis on text-based evidence, on 'ideal-typical' readers as molded by programmed scenarios. Empirical readers, conversely, can either enhance or downplay a text's multilingual potential according to their own liking. Unfortunately, that variable cannot be controlled. Situating multilingualism in the eye of the beholder, like beauty, leads to other issues, furthermore: It makes one wonder whether a multilingual text, once read monolingually by a thus empowered empirical reader, ceases to be multilingual for all intents and purposes. This strikes me as both missing the point and dismissing the potential of literary multilingualism.

Not all multilingual texts, as we have seen, fit into this either/or logic. True, a fair number do function according to symmetrical or shared multilingualism. They 'imply' bilingual readers (at the expense of monolingual readers) by juxtaposing languages, with little overlap in the form of translations or explanations. *Voyna i mir* or *Der Zauberberg* program a polyglot Model Reader (familiar with, respectively: Russian, French, and German; German, French, and Italian). Such a bijective link or one-to-one correspondence is not always obtained, obviously. The multilingualism displayed by other texts (such as the ones by Stavans and Lakhous discussed previously) is *asymmetrical* in that it includes more than one language yet constructs a monolingual Model Reader. Other texts still (e.g., *Texaco*, *A Clockwork Orange*) try to overcome the binary opposition between the exigencies of bilingual competence (an ideal that can

only be met by a minority of actual readers) and the accommodation of monolingual incompetence. By taking advantage of shared language repertoires but without excluding real-life readers who lack such repertoires, they can be read both bilingually and monolingually.

A word, in closing, about the politics that often accompany the poetics of multilingualism. There is no escaping the fact that multicultural texts from “contact literatures” (Kachru) interweave languages in ways that differ radically from, and hence create different reader profiles than, the classical (Western) canon of multilingual writing. Tolstoy and Mann, to say nothing of T.S. Eliot, combine ‘high’ codes but simultaneously lock out vernaculars. Tolstoy focused on French (and to a lesser extent German) in his novel but had no time for the diglossic dynamics between Russian and, say, Ukrainian (still considered a Russian ‘dialect’ in his day). Nor did Mann contrast *Hochdeutsch* and *Plattdeutsch* in *Der Zauberberg* (as he previously had in *Buddenbrooks* [1901]) or Eliot, Missouri-born, Boston-educated, and London-based, investigate the politics of Transatlantic English. It is almost as if only Europe’s *Kultursprachen* were socially acceptable, allowed into the drawing room (*salonfähig*); vernaculars were relegated to the kitchen, invisible and inaudible. This status quo has been forcefully questioned by postcolonial authors. Using blended multilingualism to refract, rather than reflect, language configurations and conflicts, they have been able to go beyond the usual binaries (here vs. there, us vs. them, high vs. low) by creating a positive tension between monolingual and bilingual reading processes.

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Unmooring Literary Multilingualism Studies

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Abstract

This article asks what it would mean for literary multilingualism studies to start by challenging dominant paradigms that govern conceptions of what “multilingualism” means, along lines suggested in applied linguistics in moves towards language practices of the Global South. It takes a cue from Alison Phipps’s call to decolonize multilingualism: turning away from fluency in “too many colonial languages” and towards more contingent ways of being in language, typified by the linguistic “unmooring” experienced by those who become refugees. It finds its model in the poetry of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, born in Baddawi camp in Lebanon, as a means to reflect on multilingualism beginning from the space of the camp.

Keywords

literary multilingualism – decolonial – refugee writing – Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

Multilingualism is in the news again, as I write from London in the spring of 2022. Vladimir Putin has invaded Ukraine under the pretext of ‘liberating’ Russian speakers in the east of the country, and UK and US news sources are turning to language to interpret Ukrainian social realities and the politics of the conflict (Bilewicz, 2022; Pluzhnyk, 2022). British and American news channels interviewing Ukrainians who have fled across the border to Poland have found no shortage of people among them able and willing to speak English; still, though, many have struggled with information and visa application forms issued by the British Home Office, which are not available in Ukrainian (Bychawski, 2022). Meanwhile, the online language-learning platform Babbel has made its services free to Ukrainian refugees wanting to learn Polish, German, or English,

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while Duolingo reports a 1216% rise in people signing up to learn Ukrainian (Babbel; Delgado, 2022). Less (and far less sympathetic) coverage is meanwhile being given to the refugees who continue to arrive on the English coast via the perilous English Channel crossing from northern France in small boats, fleeing some of the world's other most dangerous countries and war zones—Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen—or to the forms of language they speak (Refugee Council, 2021). The newly passed Nationality and Borders Bill now makes it possible for the UK government to 'offshore' refugees arriving via this route, transporting them more than 5000 miles to Rwanda.

Even this brief snapshot, from a devastating few weeks' news from this corner of the Global North, points not just to the diversity of phenomena and experiences held under the umbrella of multilingualism but also to the political stakes of parsing it. It takes in institutionally taught and accredited multilingual competence, focused on English as a 'global language'—such as in the British Council, which, in partnership with the Ukraine Ministry of Education and Science, has been actively promoting English in Ukraine's universities since 2014, in relation to Ukraine's aspirations towards Europeanisation and internationalisation (Bolitho and West, 2017). Equally, it points to the diverse linguistic realities in a place like Ukraine where two named languages, Russian and Ukrainian, exist in complex political relation to each other, but also in a translanguaging relationship in actually existing language communities that is not easily reducible to either/or (Tovares, 2019). Those kinds of language practices do not figure on the radar of for-profit global digital language-learning platforms, developed by computational engineers, geared to particular kinds of multilingual praxis between distinct named languages (Gramling, 2021). These companies nevertheless are stepping in to offer language-learning support—a generous move, albeit one which is unarguably good for the brand—in some situations (though not in others) where people have been suddenly forced into new multilingual relations through displacement. The desire people feel to learn new forms of language may be motivated or compelled by pragmatic social need; it may also reflect other kinds of urges, of identification or longing, including towards the possibility of solidarity held in the urge to learn the language of newly arrived refugees.

At the same time, flickering in the background of the news reports, we can make out what Alison Phipps has called experiences of linguistic "unmooring"—multilingualisms that are born of sudden disruption, uprooting, loss. As she writes, "The unmoorings—the loss of both anchors—of multilingualism are myriad and are occurring at the levels of self and personhood, kinship and family, community, work, environment, market, politics (local/global)" (2013: 99). As Phipps points out, it is "the migrants, the refugees and asylum seekers

who live amongst us” who are most likely to be unmoored in these ways—those for whom “words do not do what they want them to do,” and “there is little choice about words and how they might work in any intersections with the bureaucratic and state powers which determine the status, safety and security that might offer moorings” (100–1). These are unchosen multilingualisms, born of necessity, such as the need for what Phipps has called elsewhere “Home Office English” (2019: 47). Phipps’s words speak to the present moment and are a reminder of all the multilingualisms arising out of conflict or climate catastrophe. They provoke the question: What would it mean for our field to focus attention on multilingualism from below, on multilingual subjectivity and creativity born of unmooring, on migration and displacement? On the multilingual spaces of ‘third countries,’ refugee camps, or detention centres? What would this do to our thinking about language, readerships and questions of literary production and literary form?

The Palestinian poet, translator, and academic Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, who was born in Baddawi camp in northern Lebanon, reflects in his work on the refugee camp as a multilingual space which acts on language in particular kinds of ways. Baddawi was established in the mid-1950s as a site for Palestinian refugees displaced by the Nakba: a permanently impermanent place that has been home to generations in families like Qasmiyeh’s, and which has hosted successive waves of ‘new’ refugees since, most recently from Syria—not only Syrians but also displaced Palestinians and Iraqis living in Syria, who have found themselves “refugees once more” since the outbreak of the most recent conflict (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015).¹ In an interview for the *Asymptote* blog, Qasmiyeh considers the “linguistic and dialectal dimension” of the camp as a living place of refugee-refugee exchange:

Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi dialects are now uttered in the same space, in camps that have transcended the “gathering” sign to become the “gatherer”; the active participle, the doer whose main presence is dependent on being occupied and used. [...] This (dis)order has always attracted me to my camp. It attracts me for it is the dialect that we at times suppress to conceal who we are. It attracts me when such dialects are exaggerated or perhaps elongated to occupy a place that is neither theirs nor ours. The shibboleth has never been clearer.

KWEK, 2017

¹ On the permanent impermanence of Baddawi camp, see Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013: 131–43).

In Baddawi camp, one named language, Arabic, dissolves into multiple Arabics (“Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi dialects”) being spoken in “the same space” in unruly relation. It is hard to keep people or forms of language apart in the cramped confines of a camp like Baddawi, one square kilometre with a population of more than thirty thousand people; even as “shibboleths” stand between them to mark insider from outsider. We might ask what conception of multilingualism would be sufficient to account for the complexity of these linguistic realities. Qasmiyeh thinks of the camp acting on language through its material and social organisation, which is reciprocally shaped by the operations of language within it. He thinks of it, too, as a place where people imagine and perform themselves through language: as camouflage, to stake a claim, to identify, to exclude. Language, in turn, is shifted by these acts, being “suppress[ed],” “exaggerated,” or “elongated” into new forms. In circumstances of material deprivation and physical restriction, in a camp regulated and structured by the dictates of the Lebanese state, UNRWA, and UNHCR,² language is a location of (dis)order that both replicates and exceeds the constraints of camp life. As I’ll go on to explore in more detail, Qasmiyeh’s poetry articulates a way of being in and understanding language that emerges from the vantage point of the camp.

Research in literary multilingualism has often been more or less explicitly aligned with a political commitment to language diversity in the name of social justice. In American studies, it emerged in the 1990s in the context of English-only language politics and with a focus on African American, Jewish American, and Latinx writers in particular, resistantly pointing up linguistic unmooring as a different kind of American origin-story and casting Americanness as inescapably multilingual, transnational, and porous.³ Scholars in our field are often explicit in their contestation of monolingualist constructions of global publishing and the nation-state.⁴ But, as we know, this is frequently in tension with our disciplinary locations as scholars employed in English departments, modern languages departments, or in comparative literature, in universities in the Global North or shaped by the expectations of Global North scholarship, working on and between named languages; and, we might add, often possessing prestige multilingual competencies, in historically dominant

2 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). On the relationship between UNRWA and UNHCR in Baddawi camp, see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh (2017: n.p.).

3 For example, North (1994); Sollors, ed. (1998); Sommer (2004); Cutter (2005); Wirth-Nesher (2006); Miller (2011); Lauret (2014).

4 In addition to many of the above, examples include Lennon (2010) and Yildiz (2012).

languages, reflecting particular kinds of education and elite language trajectories. Phipps has written resonantly of her realisation, born out of her efforts at decolonial practice, that “my own multilingualism, with which and for which I had toiled with a fiercely resistant pride, was simply that of one who is fluent in way too many colonial languages” (2019: 2). The question, then, is how to bridge the distance between the whole continuum of multilingual experience in language practices on the ground, and particular models of language and multilingualism driven by academic disciplinarity, institutionalization, and the logic of global publishing. What do we need to do to think our field differently?

One answer might be to look to applied linguistics in the Global South, and what it tells us about the origin, nature, and limits of some commonly accepted ideas about language. In *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook consider how the invented idea of ‘languages’ as bounded entities came to be projected onto, and then ultimately to determine, how people use and interpret their own and others’ language resources; tracing the specifically colonial, imperial, and ethnonationalist histories which underpin the idea of “the language” as a singularity, and its real-world effects (2007: 1–41).⁵ And as their more recent work (2012; 2020) explicitly argues, this has implications, too, for multilingualism, insofar as it remains founded in this view of language and conceived as the multiplication of monolanguages. As they point out, in many Southern contexts such concepts as “a language,” “mother tongue,” or “multilingualism” may not be much help in reflecting how people actually use language, which “can be better described as forms of *multilanguaging*” (2020: 55, citing Makalela, 1–8).⁶

In many African contexts, where multilingualism is a “lingua franca,” “languages are so deeply intertwined and fused into each other that the level of fluidity renders it difficult to determine any boundaries that may indicate that there are different languages involved” (Makoni and Pennycook, 2012: 447). Equally, in what Emi Otsuji and Pennycook (2015) call “metrolingualism,” commonly a product of modern, mostly urban everyday interaction, people of diverse linguistic backgrounds share, combine, and play with systems of

5 Although it is important to note how monolingualisms differ in their ideological construction and effects. As Gramling points out, not only is “Brazilian monolingualism, which is a strongly expressed ideology too [...] quite different in its effects, designs, and ethnicizing/racializing logics than is US American monolingualism or Turkish monolingualism,” but we also need to take account of the “decolonial potency” of other local articulations such as “Bangla, Tamil, Diné, or Kurdish monolingualisms” (2022: 4–5).

6 On Global South perspectives, see also Heugh and Stroud (2018).

meaning as ways to define themselves through language, in ways that are not necessarily defined by ethnicity, nationality, or geography. These multilayered, dynamic, and fluid ways of experiencing and practising language point to the limits of concepts and terminology that continue to assume languages as distinct, homogeneous, bounded entities, even in the plural: bilingualism, multilingualism, code-switching, plurilingualism, polylingualism, and so on. These terms continue to have meaning for our field, of course, just as a language as a singularity does. These are ideas invested with real meaning and significance by history, politics, and social practice, as well as holding “durable power” for the many people who use them, for whom “traditional, perhaps conservative constructions of languages” matter “in everyday interactions, in personal imaginings, and in forms of desiring” (Gramling, 2021: 31). But it is worth asking: what would it mean to take Global South *multilingua francas*, or contemporary urban metrolingualism—rather than a particular understanding of ‘languages’ originating in the European nation-state—as the model for the field, as the prism through which to view literary multilingualism?

Makoni and Pennycook take aim at assumptions about language that underpin and shape the cultural-political world, which also determine our critical fields: theirs, applied linguistics; and by extension ours, literary multilingualism. And they try to show how we might think them otherwise. After all, received ideas about literary language, too, are shaped by networks of political, raciolinguistic, institutional, and global publishing power, which determine and permit certain kinds of language practice and disallow others.⁷

A critical literary multilingualism studies will be able to attend to those ordinary ‘multilingualisms’—or metrolingualisms, creoles, translanguaging practices, *multilingua francas*—which live (and have always lived) outside university classrooms and libraries, outside circuits of global publishing, often in the shadow of classed or raciolinguistic violence; alongside and in relation to institutionally sanctioned multilingualisms of various kinds. It will think about how all these linguistic practices make their way into literature, which will also entail paying attention to the real-world materiality of literary production. Global publishing markets favour the novel, the form which has so far predominated in literary multilingualism studies, raising questions which will continue to concern us, such as the kinds of multilingualism in the novel which do or don’t travel (for example in Brian Lennon’s [2010] “strong plurilingualism” versus Rebecca Walkowitz’s [2015] “born translated” novel). Anjali

7 On raciolinguistics, see Alim, Rickford, and Ball (2016); Rosa and Flores (2017).

Pandey (2016) coins the term “linguistic exhibitionism” for the tokenising of South Asian languages in prize-winning Anglophone novels, which perform a superficial multilingualism while simultaneously espousing a monolingualist, Anglocentric logic.

But we should also be encouraged to think about different kinds of publishing or circulation practices that operate with different forms, at different scales, and/or in relation to different ideas of linguistic community, whether that means local networks of small presses (what Francesca Orsini [2015] terms the “multilingual local”) or the transnational digital reach of online poetry.⁸ In other words, as our understanding of multilingualism becomes diversified and contested, so too do our understandings of literary multilingualism and our objects of study. In English-medium writing on refugee experience, for instance, Anna Bernard (2020) has recently suggested that three genres dominate—poetry, graphic narrative, and verbatim theatre—because of their modes of production and because of the kinds of engagement they ask of their audience. To these we might add the proliferation of short story anthologies published in direct response to the refugee ‘crisis’ of 2015 in Europe and the US travel ban of 2017 (Bond, 2019). These are all literary forms (among others) which, therefore, a critical literary multilingualism studies needs to take into its purview in order to be able to ask how they figure (or don’t) the linguistic unmooredness which is attendant on becoming a refugee, and which is therefore a predominant multilingualism of the world today. As David Gramling has argued, ‘multilingualism’ in fact stands for a complex of ideas, practices, and experiences with no fixed valency or politics. But we can, at the same time, aspire to a particular conception of it: one which is “renewed, human-centred, community-responsive, macroeconomically inconvenient, planetary-rather-than-global” (2021: 37).

Dialect and the Shibboleth: Yousif M. Qasmiyeh’s *Writing the Camp*

I want to think now about what such an understanding of multilingualism might look like in literary studies by briefly considering Qasmiyeh’s first poetry collection, *Writing the Camp* (2021). Lyndsey Stonebridge has described Qasmiyeh as a poet of the “borderline condition,” writing of “the newest lost

8 For other recent reflections on what centring alternative visions of language and languaging might do for the discipline of world literature, see Helgesson and Kullberg (2018). On language in digital social networks, see Jacquemet (2019).

isle in the poetics of statelessness, the permanent refugee camp” (2016: 1336, 1348). *Writing the Camp* dwells on Baddawi camp as a material and existential space, from which it departs—to other camps, on journeys, lorry and boat crossings, into the border regimes of Europe and the wider geographies of the Palestinian refugee diaspora—and to which it returns. The collection is written in what Qasmiyeh has called a “third language”: an English which is refracted through Arabic etymologies and through the world of the camp (qtd. in Stonebridge, 2016: 1354).

The camp in *Writing the Camp* is a place of “dialects”: a term for the ways of speaking, living in, and understanding the world that are produced by camp life. “Dialects” for Qasmiyeh are the language of the camp, a sign of the different and shifting communities of refugees who call the camp home, the “Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi dialects” that intersect within it (Kwek, 2017). But rather than being synonymous with the linguistic in the restricted sense, “dialect” is a multimodal container for all the layered ways of making meaning in the camp, for its symbolic life, as it is practised in language, rituals, memories, gestures, bodily practices. In this sense “dialect” is a conscious and constantly evolving archive of camp life, what Qasmiyeh has called “an act of continuous archiving whereby refugees themselves (consciously) narrate the camp in their daily presences in ways that not only instate their solitude but are also essential to remember who they are” (2020: 53). As a keyword which echoes and repeats across the collection, “dialect” more broadly comes to represent the layered aporetic meanings and mysteries of life in the camp, and even ultimately to stand for the camp itself.

Yet, as a form or practice of language, “dialect” is an outrage to notions of linguistic purity which tether the camp to ideas of untainted inheritance. In the poem “Dialects,” Qasmiyeh writes: “At secondary school, one teacher in particular never liked my dialect since it did not, according to him, convey enough Palestinianness” (2021a: 110). In the camp, language may be a tempting place to locate an imagined “Palestinianness” that remains untouched by grief, loss, and displacement. But this is a chimaera born of the teacher’s “obsess[ion] with his own purities,” whose own language is in fact just one more “dialect” among others (2021a: 110). In the prose poem “Contamination,” the speaker is again told “that my dialect is not as pure as it should be”: “According to them, I have failed to preserve what I have inherited. But in truth I have inherited nothing. I just heard noises and without even knowing how or why, I accumulated some in my pockets and ran away. I robbed them in daylight” (2021a: 8). Language is no longer (if it ever was) something to be retained or passed down, but the poem reframes conceptions of linguistic lack, loss, or “contamination” into the active work of language-making as a survival practice: opportunisti-

cally stealing away with and ingesting what you can, and making it your own: “I swallowed what became mine quickly” (2021a: 8). And in “Contamination,” this reads like a triumph of sorts. As the poem concludes: “I smile without letting my dialect know that I still do not know what it might sound like in the singular”: (2021a: 8).

“Dialect” in Qasmiyeh’s poetry is defined not by singularity, nor by ethnicity, history, or geography, but by the time and space of the camp. The permanent impermanence of the camp is captured in a language of suspended temporality: the “pending places that are called camps” are distinguished by “time [...] suspended between dialects” (2021a: 61, 63).⁹ Both the camp and its dialects are characterised by an interplay between tenuous kinds of permanence and that which is improvised, or repurposed, and constantly being remade. Both are built of heterogeneous materials that are not necessarily of their makers’ choosing but nevertheless reflect their ingenuity and agency, their losses and hopes. In “Thresholds,” a father builds the “first threshold to our house,” a way of claiming land and of building onto the space allocated for dwelling (2021a: 15). The threshold is an ambiguous space, the meeting point between interior and exterior, private and public, both an exit and an entrance (2021b: 60). The poem asks: “For whom are these thresholds created?” It answers: they are built for the people of the house, who then “become the people of the threshold,” granted the power it bestows, to welcome or to exclude. And they are for visitors, for whom the threshold is a place of welcome, there to “baptise the feet” of those who enter, as well as a barrier that might “sacrifice” the visitor “at the builder’s doorstep” (Qasmiyeh, 2021a: 15, 16). The threshold’s construction becomes a claim not only on space but on time, a site the symbolic proportions of which outstrip the house to which it is notionally attached:

A solid place or a conspicuous marker for residents and foreigners alike to visit whenever they feel like it; a place which suddenly becomes more central in our existence than the house or home itself.

[...]

Our threshold shall not die.

It shall always be there for the enterers, the exiters and above all the escapees.

Blessed is the stone of men and beasts!

2021a: 15, 16

⁹ For more on the temporalities of Baddawi camp, see Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013).

The threshold as a place of both welcome and exclusion stands for the camp itself, and the place of language within it. As Qasmiyeh writes in the titular prose poem “Writing the Camp”:

The camp is never the same albeit with roughly the same area. New faces, new dialects, narrower alleys, newly-constructed and ever-expanding thresholds and doorsteps, intertwined clothing lines and electrical cables, well-shielded balconies, little oxygen and impenetrable silences are all amassed in this space. The shibboleth has never been clearer and more poignant than it is now.

Refugees ask other refugees, who are we to come to you and who are you to come to us? Nobody answers. Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Kurds share the camp, the same-different camp, the camp of a camp. They have all come to re-originate the beginning with their own hands and feet.

2021a: 59

“Ever-expanding” inside its own tightly bounded confines, the camp is constantly being reshaped by the hospitality offered to new refugees, producing multiple versions of itself, born of the constant influx of “new faces, new dialects.” At the same time, though, the “shibboleth” is always there to mark the boundary within the camp’s cramped environs. In “Refugees are dialectical beings,” Qasmiyeh writes: “My cousins in Nahr Al-Bared camp have always preserved their dialect to the extent of preserving it with their fists” (2021a: 64). Nahr Al-Bared was destroyed by the Lebanese army in 2007, its inhabitants relocated to other camps including Baddawi: it is the disappeared camp whose dialect remains as its trace to be “preserved.” And so the paradox of “dialect” is to be protean and unfixed, while at the same time containing “shibboleths” that distinguish insider from outsider, even violently, and even when the place to which they ostensibly belong no longer exists. The mythological relationship between language and land, central to European-derived ideas about language but also to invocations of linguistic “Palestinianness” grounded in a homeland that is elsewhere, comes under pressure throughout *Writing the Camp*. What happens to language when the place it comes from is destroyed? How do we think about language from the vantage point of a place that is permanently impermanent? How does language reflect a “home” that is simultaneously here and somewhere else?

In their academic work on Baddawi camp and on refugee-refugee forms of humanitarianism, Qasmiyeh and his collaborator Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh have turned to Jacques Derrida’s concept of “hostipitality.” Hospitality, says Derrida, is only ever conditional, never absolute. To be able to offer hospitality one must be in a position to do so, to be “master of the threshold” and able

to determine who may come across it (Derrida, 2000: 6). Thus, hospitality is always “parasitised by its opposite, ‘hostility,’ the undesirable guest which it harbours as the self-contradiction within its own body” (2000: 3). As Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh put it:

Hospitality, as such, is never absolute: the possibility of rejection—and overt violence—is always already there. A neighbour can only ever welcome another neighbour in a conditional way—to offer welcome is always already to have the power to delimit the space or place that is being offered to the Other.

2017: n.p.

As Derrida himself notes, he parses European hospitality through European languages—in French, with turns to English, by way of Kant and Heidegger’s German and Benveniste’s Indo-European researches. Centring the language-world of the camp, Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh turn instead to the etymology of the Arabic *aljiran* (neighbour). The term signifies relations, both spatial and moral, defined in the Qur’an and the prophetic tradition by “proximity, neighbourhood and charity;” but it is also a contested term that provokes opposing meanings. In *Lisan Al-Arab*, “the authoritative and encyclopedia Arabic dictionary,”

[T]he neighbour is thus:

The one whose house is next to yours, the stranger, the partner, the beneficiary, the ally, the supporter, the spouse, the intimate parts, the house that is closer to the coast, the good, the bad, the hypocrite, the changeable, the kind.

FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH and QASMIYEH, 2017: n.p.¹⁰

Hospitality in language is as ambivalent as any other kind. In Baddawi camp, refugee-refugee relations are characterised by generosity and welcome, but also conflict over scarce space, resources, and opportunities, in which “a hierarchy of refugee-ness” has emerged such that “established residents describe ‘Other’ refugees ‘as’ refugees, clearly differentiating between the camps’ natives (the original, authentic refugees) and the newcomers (somehow inauthentic and challenging the rights of ‘established’ refugees)” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh, 2017: n.p.). In such circumstances, “dialect” readily becomes “a

10 Yousif M. Qasmiyeh’s translation.

knife," a shibboleth severing insider from outsider (Qasmiyeh, 2021a: 64). But *Writing the Camp* is conscious of the shibboleths of English, too, as a language of global human rights law, of NGOs, of aid agencies; in Britain, taken to demarcate the inside/outside of national belonging while also being a language of the rejected asylum claim and the "Reporting Centre" (Qasmiyeh, 2021a: 19, 31). Poems in *Writing the Camp* re-evaluate an English lexicon of border security: fingerprinting, foreigners, contamination, invasion. To be welcomed in language is as ambivalent as any other welcome and comes with the same conditions. As Qasmiyeh writes: "I think of their language in order to die next to them. This does not mean that we will ever die together. Nor is it a statement of love. It is, above all, an attempt to stay silent" (2021a: 81).

In "Language, Home and Threshold," Qasmiyeh describes his first encounter with English, in Baddawi camp as a child, through the acronym UNWRA, which is "the English for those who cannot read English but can still see difference: from rations received seasonally bearing the letters U-N-W-R-A, from recycled school books doubly and triply sealed with those five letters" (2021b: 59). UNWRA is the visually distinct sign of English stamped on camp life, standing for the international aid that both sustains and circumscribes it. But it is also, for Qasmiyeh, an early sign of how language travels: stripped of its status as an acronym, absorbed in the camp "into a fully-fledged Arabic word," "carrying a meaning in one language extracted from traces of another" (2021b: 59). This ambivalent image of his "earliest English"—a language of external authority, a tool for survival, a sign of difference, something that claims the referential solidity of an acronym while becoming at the same time "two languages sit[ting] side by side"—becomes a sign for his poetic language to come, a poetry "continually in translation," not unidirectionally from Arabic into English but ambivalently occupying the threshold between them. "Language, for me, will always be at the threshold," Qasmiyeh writes: not a threshold that he is the master of, with "the *mine-ness* of possession," but a threshold he crosses in poetry looking for a way to be "reattache[d] to a place in language," figuring this relationship as a "pact with what is not mine topographically, strictly speaking, though given access to wander within its parameters" (2021b: 61).

This necessary slippage between place and language is encapsulated when Qasmiyeh considers the Arabic word *bayt*: "house (also home)." Polysemic, densely layered with meanings,

In Arabic [...] *bayt* is not merely a word. It is in essence a contract between the occupants and the place for neither party to relinquish the other until the day comes. Where one rests is where one rests completely.

This is the Arabic premise as inferred from what a *bayt* is. That is why it is classically taken to mean the home and the tomb. You live, and you die, in the place. The three letters *b-y-t* (with the muted middle sound) resemble a middleness that is all-encompassing, where all gravitates to the middle. Within the middle lies the dweller and the dead in the very same spot.

2021b: 61

House, home, tomb, interiority, place of living and dying, sacred and profane, place of “the now-time and the hereafter.” The power of *bayt* is such that in English translation, Qasmiyeh writes, he seeks to nullify it, shearing it of its “afterlives,” to render it “as benignly as possible for the sake of holding on to the secrets of a language that I claim to be mine” (2021b: 61). But in his poetry, *bayt*’s secrets become part of its temporal architecture, written in “as though it were the pending tomb, a deferred time that I am now living in retrospect” (2021b: 61). As Qasmiyeh writes in “Refugees are dialectical beings,”

In the camp, going to the cemetery is going to the camp and going to the camp is going to the cemetery.

In Baddawi, reaching the camp only occurs through the cemetery.

Is the cemetery not another home, host and God?

In entering the camp, time becomes suspended between dialects.

2021a: 63

Conclusion: Hope, Hospitality, and the Dialect to Come

Hospitality, Derrida writes, is always hovering “on the threshold of itself,” cancelling itself out in the gesture of offering itself.

It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home [...] on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home.

2000: 14

Nevertheless, he calls us to imagine a hospitality to come, impossible (“hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality”) but necessary, that can be completely open to the other (2000: 14–15). Qasmiyeh’s language practice, in the

same way, is angled towards the future, towards a dialect to come that is the analogue of the hospitality to come envisioned by Derrida:

Taught to speak in dialect, I pronounced what I heard, never as things that were, but as a supplement to what a dialect would be one day, free of shibboleths, with a place for an other as he is. Through dialect, rehearsing is what I have been doing for a long time, for a second tongue where mispronunciation is the law and where meaning is susceptible to (and suspicious of) all places we call home, thresholds and corners. To be suspicious in writing is to write memory anew as though it had never existed. It is in meaning (according to its Arabic pattern, the word *ma'na*—meaning—is technically a place!) where language and place meet as a filiation that knows no stasis.

QASMIYEH, 2021b: 61–62

This way of thinking about language, starting from the place of the camp, allows Qasmiyeh to imagine a de-essentialised dialect of the future, shorn of any claims to ownership or “being-at-home.” Eschewing the conventions of belonging in language—of ‘mother tongue,’ ‘native speaker,’ ‘correctness’—his is a gesture of longing towards a shared medium that is nobody’s possession, a “second tongue” in which “mispronunciation is the law.”

Qasmiyeh’s aporetic, visionary, and unapologetically radical poetic vision is refracted through what Phipps calls “unmooredness” as an experience of language, parsing its dynamics and its political, philosophical, and aesthetic potentialities. In *Writing the Camp*, “dialects” are as various, complex, tenacious, and fragile as the camp itself, and represent a way of understanding language not as an entity that might be singular or multiplied but as a practice: “‘Dialects’ is not a plural,” writes Qasmiyeh (2021a: 64). In an obvious way, this points towards the insufficiency of seeing languages as bounded systems coterminous with national borders—how could this be squared with the language-world of Baddawi camp, which sits within the borders and jurisdiction of the Lebanese state but occupies a completely different space of language, history, and imagination?—but also tries to look past them. Qasmiyeh’s staging of language simultaneously recognises individual named languages as social and political realities, and frames a way of being in language that refuses their either/or relationship, orienting itself towards a future beyond it: “what a dialect would be one day, free of shibboleths, with a place for an other as he is.”

It is this attempt to think about more equitable ways of understanding and using language—which I’ve suggested is represented in Qasmiyeh’s poetry, and which is also to be found in applied linguistics grounded in ques-

tions of decoloniality and Global South ways of knowing—which a critical literary multilingualism studies can and should concern itself with. And I say this not least because we are committed to making the claim that literature is a space for the working-out of conceptions of what it means to be a speaking subject, to use language, to understand what language means to us individually and collectively and in the world. In this respect, we might see the practices of our field as contributing to what Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny term the ongoing “struggles to reclaim linguistic forms and practices stamped out by the repressions of colonial regimes,” and thus to find ways to “hope” (2017: xv).

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Reactionary Multilingualism: Ezra Pound's “Addendum for C”

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Abstract

This article suggests a solution to the paradox that Ezra Pound both embraced literary multilingualism and endorsed ethnic segregation. The evident multilingualism of Pound's poetry might tempt one into imagining that he was celebrating multilingualism as a societal fact. Focusing on Pound's multilingual canto fragment “Addendum for C,” the article argues that this cannot possibly have been the case, and that a similar premise is too often taken for granted in contemporary studies of literary multilingualism.

Keywords

literary multilingualism – modernist poetry – reactionary modernism – Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound's explorations in literary multilingualism could lead us to think that he is ultimately *celebrating* multilingualism as a cultural fact. This idea seems to me highly problematic, and such a premise is too often taken for granted in present-day studies of literary multilingualism. Although literary multilingualism as a contemporary object of study is heterogenous and fragmented, we also find some relatively established points of orientation. For example, most researchers in the field will be familiar with Yasemin Yildiz's *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012), originally published in 2006 as *Beyond the Mother Tongue: Configurations of Multilingualism in Twentieth-Century German Literature*. The 2012 title indicates that, according to Yildiz, we are at present finding ourselves in the complex territory of “the postmonolingual condition,” presumably a play on French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's

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concept of “the postmodern condition” (in the work bearing this title, originally published in 1979). Where Lyotard diagnosed the postmodern period as being an era when metadiscourses and metanarratives had lost their legitimacy, Yildiz’s title indicates that at present the monolingual ideology, so closely connected to the modern nation-state, is losing legitimacy in a similar way.

Rainer Guldin stresses that “not every multilingual literary text is necessarily better or more creative than its monolingual counterpart” and observes, in my opinion quite correctly, that in recent debates “the notion of multilingualism has been used in a primarily emancipative way, as a one-sided promise of unfettered, liberating and in some cases even redemptive cultural and political multiplicity and equality” (2020: 3). In their introduction to *Multilingual Literatures as World Literature* (2021), Jane Hiddleston and Wen-chin Ouyang seem largely in tune with such an attitude when they claim that multilingual literatures “resist linguistic, national or communitarian boundaries” (2) and that there is an “ethical dimension” in the difference between “a monolingual vision of the world and a multilingual one,” where the former “can be exclusive of diversity” while the latter “is by definition inclusive” (9). When we read such statements, it is tempting to claim that literary multilingualism is indeed being conceived as an emancipatory practice per se. If we are to accept such a conception, we might assume literary multilingualism to be affiliated with other *progressive* ideas. But is it all that obvious that there might not also exist a sort of *reactionary* literary multilingualism? Could even the existence of such a reactionary multilingualism be a ‘blind spot’ in some of the present-day research on literary multilingualism? In this article, I will discuss the example of Ezra Pound (1885–1972) to shed light on these questions.

1 Ezra Pound’s ‘Reactionary Multilingualism’

Pound evidently wrote multilingual literature, or “polyglot poetry,” to use the expression Leonard Forster put forth in his groundbreaking 1968 lectures published as *The Poet’s Tongues* (1970). Pound and his friend and colleague T. S. Eliot not only used “polyglot quotation as a stylistic device” but went further and made it “an element of their personal style,” the result being “polyglot poetry, in which several different languages are used to form the texture of the poem” (1970: 74–75).

Pound has been given due attention by Forster as well as by prominent scholars such as Lawrence Venuti (1995), Steven Yao (2002), and Jahan Ramazani (2009), in their works within the fields of translation studies, modernist translation and translational poetics respectively. However, if we conceive of literary multilingualism as a field of study in its own right, we must conclude that

Pound here tends to get no more than a cursory mention. This is surely not because his poetry is insufficiently multilingual. As every reader of Pound's magnum opus knows, *The Cantos* is a poem profoundly marked by multiple bits and pieces of Romance languages accompanying or interrupting the English-language verses; as early as in the second canto, Greek orthography shows up—not to mention Pound's more or less infamous deployment of Chinese written characters, the first instance of which, 信, transcribed as *xin*, is to be found at the end of Canto 34 (although, even if the canto in question was originally published as part of *Eleven New Cantos* in 1934, the *xin* character was not added until the 1956 edition of *The Cantos*). So why does not Pound play a greater part in discussions of literary multilingualism?

One reason that Pound is somewhat neglected in the field of literary multilingualism may be that he is politically controversial, with his support of Mussolini and his later straying far in the direction of white supremacism. The scholarship devoted to Pound's work in general is extensive, but since he arguably represents some sort of *original alt-right* politics, it is not surprising if someone wishes to tone down his importance or simply offer him less attention. However, this is precisely what is problematic for such a field of study as that of literary multilingualism: A belated 'no platforming' is perhaps understandable when it comes to Pound, but it risks smoothing over the rougher edges of multilingual literary practice. If the studies of literary multilingualism at the very outset are limited to its assumed 'progressive' representatives, we risk missing out on important historical liaisons between such multilingual practices and reactionary politics.

In the 1980s, Jeffrey Herf wrote about "the paradox of reactionary modernism" (1984, 1). Admittedly, when using the term "modernism," Herf was primarily referring to a sort of general civilizational and technological rationalism, rather than artistic modernism. However, even modernist art often went hand in hand with reactionary politics. In and of itself this may seem somewhat paradoxical, but as a factual observation it is hardly controversial. Even if we limit ourselves to the literary domain, we realize that Pound was not alone in combining reactionary political attitudes and modernist aesthetics. So did the likes not only of his brother-in-arms Eliot, but other central modernists as well—Gottfried Benn, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Ernst Jünger, Curzio Malaparte, and Luigi Pirandello, to name but a few. Still, would not *reactionary multilingualism* count as an all-out paradox, almost an oxymoron?

I will not deny that Pound's political leanings are hard to square with his poetry's openness for a multitude of cultures and languages. How does one reconcile Pound's lifelong literary heterogeneity and what eventually became a segregationist stance on his part? Alec Marsh concludes that Pound's *Cantos* is a work

in which the poet “constantly brings together what his ideology concludes must be kept apart” (2015: 159). This may appear like an unsolvable paradox. How could Pound simultaneously embrace literary multilingualism and support ethnic segregation? In what follows, I will present a reading of Pound’s 1941 canto fragment “Addendum for C” that suggests a possible answer to these questions.

2 “Addendum for C” as Political Poetry

Pound originally published “Addendum for C” in 1942, in the New York–based magazine *Vice Versa*. The title Pound gave it at the time was “Canto Preceding (72 Circa)”. Pound later expressed a wish to name the fragment “From Canto C” (“C” as in the roman numeral for 100), but his editor James Laughlin ultimately persuaded him to title it “Addendum for CANTO C” when he included it as the penultimate piece in *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX–CXVII* (1968)—despite the title indicating that the book starts with Canto 110. In later editions, the title of the fragment has been simplified to “Addendum for C.” If we are to believe the dating given in *Drafts & Fragments*, Pound wrote the fragment in 1941.

In an article in *Paideuma*, the journal originally devoted to Pound scholarship, Ethan Lewis states that “Addendum for C” seems a “wholly arbitrary title chosen to accord with the symmetry of the *Commedia*” (1991: 65), that is, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. This might indeed be the case. Pound saw Dante’s work as a primary model for his own, letting people imagine that he, at a certain point, himself would end up with a total of a hundred cantos, as would explain his wording in a letter to Eliot of January 18, 1940: Here, Pound stated that he still had “29 canters to write” (Redman, 1991: 194). Given such a clue, one can surely argue that the title “Addendum for C” suggests that this is a fragment that Pound wanted to assign an extraordinary importance. And in fact, it does contain some crucial keys both to Pound’s politics and his poetics, and to how he conceived of these as intertwined.

As a young man, Pound was much the aesthete, but he became increasingly concerned with economic theorizing and Realpolitik. The two final stanzas of “Addendum for C” testify to this change:

Sero, sero! learned that Spain is mercury;
that Finland is nickel. Late learning!
S..... doing evil in place of the R.....
“A pity that poets have used symbol and metaphor
and no man learned anything from them
for their speaking in figures.”

All other sins are open,
 Usura alone not understood.
 Opium Shanghai, opium Singapore
 "with the silver spilla ...
 amber, caught up and turned ..."

Lotophagoi.

POUND, *Cantos* Add/819¹

Some quick exegetical remarks may be of use. The "S" and "R" followed by dots are shorthand for "Sassoon" and "Rothschild" (Terrell, 1993: 725). The final word "Lotophagoi" is a reference to the lotus-eaters in the ninth book of the *Odyssey*, whom Pound here chooses to parallel with Asian opium smokers, while quoting his own Canto 20 in the antepenultimate and penultimate lines. Even in the earlier canto, there was talk of Lotophagoi, "Lotophagoi of the suave nails, quiet, scornful" (Pound, *Cantos* 20/93). This line was later to be contrasted with the paradisiacal line from Canto 74: "The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful" (Pound, *Cantos*, 74/445). Commenting on the ending of "Addendum for C," Robert Casillo remarks that Pound here links usury to "poisonous drugs dispensed by Jewish opium racketeers, who have turned their victims into Lotophagoi, sunk in luxurious vegetable stupor" (1988: 237). Casillo also refers to "Addendum for C" as "hallucinatory" in itself (305).

What Pound does at the outset of the passage quoted is express some regretful "late learning." *Sero* is also the Latin word for "late." The expression "Sero, sero" was first used by Pound in Canto 25 (*Cantos*, 25/118). There it begins the lament of the Venetian stonecutters: These stonecutters complain about the parsimonious (and usurious) Venetian state, which owing to its greed has prevented them from continuing work on the Palazzo Ducale—as indicated in Canto 51, Pound saw Venice as having descended from its Renaissance greatness through usury. In the instance of "Addendum for C," the expression "Sero, sero!" certainly brings this earlier passage to mind, as well as connoting what is arguably the *locus classicus* for such a redoubling of this specific Latin word, namely a passage from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine (x, xxvii): "Sero te amavi"; Augustine repeats the expression later in the same syntactical period, something that Pound echoes with his own repetition of the word "sero." In Pound's canto, "sero" implies, we might suppose, not *late did I come to love you (God)*, as in Augustine, but rather something like *late did I come to recognize the*

1 I refer to Pound's *Cantos* in the way that is common in Pound scholarship, that is, first by indicating the canto number, then the page number of the edition used.

importance of Realpolitik. We should note the political importance ascribed to specifically economic concerns in “Addendum for C”: The poet indicates that countries tend to be treated as nothing but reservoirs for their natural resources, as betrayed in the expressions “Spain is mercury” and “Finland is nickel”—a correction in a typescript version of the fragment even suggests that “Spain equals mercury” (Ezra Pound Papers, Box 78, folder 3446). Pound’s poetry had become more explicitly political than ever.

3 *Neschek* and Τὸ καλόν as Icons of Cultural ‘Purity’

Even the first section of “Addendum for C” is political, although the specific political implications may need some additional uncovering. These are the opening lines of the fragment:

The Evil is Usury, *neschek*
 the serpent
neschek whose name is known, the defiler,
 beyond race and against race
 the defiler
 Τόκος hic mali medium est
 Here is the core of evil, the burning hell without let-up,
 The canker corrupting all things, Fafnir the worm,
 Syphilis of the State, of all kingdoms,
 Wart of the common-weal,
 Wenn-maker, corrupter of all things.
 Darkness the defiler,
 Twin evil of envy,
 Snake of the seven heads, Hydra, entering all things,
 Passing the doors of temples, defiling the Grove of Paphos,
neschek, the crawling evil,
 slime, the corrupter of all things,
 Poisoner of the fount,
 of all fountains, *neschek*,
 The serpent, evil against Nature’s increase,
 Against beauty
 Τὸ καλόν
 formosus nec est nec decens
 POUND, *Cantos* Add/818

Readers of Pound will be familiar with his rant against usury in his famous "Usury Canto," Canto 45, written six years earlier, where usury was portrayed as a force destroying the foundations of all true art. Commenting on this passage from "Addendum for C," Richard Sieburth writes that it suggests that usury is in fact "the malevolent double or Other of poetry" itself (1987: 170).

Neschek is (Pound's spelling of) the Hebrew word for "usury." Jean-Michel Rabaté claims that in this passage Pound sets *neshekh* (Rabaté's spelling) up against τὸ καλόν to thereby dramatize the antagonism between usury and wholeness. He adds that Pound dramatizes this antagonism "not for superficial (or ideological) and racist reasons, but for a conceptual reason" (1986: 188), and that Pound's use of the Hebrew term *neschek* "goes along with a refusal to identify usurers with a given race" (189). Since Rabaté published his monograph on Pound's *Cantos* in 1986, studies have emerged that paint a clearer picture of Pound's relation to antisemitism, making it very hard to deny that he, and certainly at some points, was an outright antisemite, such as Casillo's *The Genealogy of Demons* (1988). Even so, and although he admits that Pound fell into "the trap of antisemitism" and became "more and more fanatical" in his denunciation of usury, Rabaté repeats essentially the same point he had made in 1986 in an article dating from 2010, saying that Pound "qualified" this denunciation of usury "by saying that usury came from the disregard of Jewish law by Jews themselves" (2010: 138). This must refer to a much-discussed passage in the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 23:19–21).² However, what is prescribed there is not a general law against usury, but a prohibition on taking usury from one's *brethren*—not from Gentiles. This is made explicit in interpretations made not only by the likes of Martin Luther, whose vehement anti-Judaism is well-known (and were to influence the Protestant Church under Nazi Germany; see also Probst 2012), but also by a Jewish philosopher such as Moses Maimonides, as Benjamin Nelson explains in his study *The Idea of Usury* (1969: xxi, 53–54). Pound was certainly aware that the said law in Deuteronomy did not apply to Gentiles, making it more than unlikely that he would see the later practice of usury as being dependent on any "disregard of Jewish law by Jews themselves."

Not only Rabaté but also Carroll F. Terrell goes out of his way to defend Pound's deployment of the Hebrew *neschek* in "Addendum for C," partly with reference to what must be the same passage in Deuteronomy: "At the time this

2 In *Guide to Kulchur* Pound peaks of *neschek* as "corrosive usury" (1970: 42) and opposes it to *marbit* or *marbis*, which is the Hebrew word for "usury" used in Leviticus (25:35–37). The term *neshekh* also figures in Exodus (22:25–27), but it is the Deuteronomy passage that is the broadest condemnation of usurious practice in the Pentateuch.

was written Pound was aware that he was being attacked for anti-Semitism, which he vigorously denied. Thus, he uses the Hebrew word to show that the Jews from the time of Moses had rules against usury" (1993: 724). How convincing is such an interpretation? Both Terrell and Rabaté give a clear answer—and more or less the same answer—to the question of why the poet chose to use a foreign-language term in the instance of *neschek*. They argue that it has to do with a simultaneous respect for ethnicity and a denial of the relevance of ethnicity—both a denial of any importance of the all-too-infamous connection between Jews and usury, and at same time a claim that an ancient Jewish prohibition on usury is somehow still relevant. But this is saying too little. If we look at the way the term works in the text, it seems much more double-edged than what Terrell and Rabaté account for. Theirs seem to me to be very sympathetic readings, as they avoid positing any essentialist belief on Pound's part between usury as a practice and the Jews as a "race." More sharply put, Terrell and Rabaté are unduly apologetic.

There is something striking about the use of *neschek* in the "Addendum." It is not at all obvious that what the inclusion of the Hebrew term does is to invalidate any necessary link between Jews and usury. The passage bears witness to a sort of rage, and the use of the term *neschek* has among its functions to render all things "Hebrew" suspect. Read with specific attention to its sounds (most of all the alliterations, such as "canker corrupting," "Darkness the defiler," and, not least, the first line's respectively voiced and unvoiced fricatives in "Usury" and *neschek*), "Addendum for C" can be labeled an *exorcism*, that is, a spell, a poetic attempt to get rid of evil by naming it. The idea of the passage being a spell is only enhanced by the following three lines, which appear shortly after the 'exorcist' passage:

pure light, we beseech thee
 Crystal, we beseech thee
 Clarity, we beseech thee
 POUND, *Cantos* Add/819

While the naming of *neschek* should be interpreted as a way of confronting usury head on, by naming it in all the names and guises, including foreign words, that it supposedly hides under, these three lines are striking in their traditional way of expressing sincerity, like a prayer, a litany.

Established as an opposition to *neschek* in "Addendum for C," we find the Greek expression "Τὸ καλόν." Where *neschek* is said to be neither *formosus* nor *decens*, i.e., neither "shapely" nor "decent," this contrasts with "Τὸ καλόν." The latter takes on a moral dimension that is not so obviously present in the Eng-

lish word "beauty." Pound seemingly preferred the translation "order" (suggested in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* as well as in Cantos 58 and 59). In his *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) he also describes H. Rackham's translation of the term as "nobility" in the Loeb library edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as "a brilliant translation" (1970: 316). In "Addendum for C," the Greek concept is presented as endowed with an almost *innate* 'decency.' One should also note, when comparing the Hebrew and Greek used in "Addendum for C," that the Greek term is rendered in Greek letters, the Hebrew one in Latin letters. Why? Is it because the reader is supposed to be able to sound out the Greek ones, but not the Hebrew ones? Or has it got to do with the poet's own competence? Whatever the motivation Pound may have had for latinizing the orthography of the Hebrew word for "usury" but not of the Greek for "beauty," using the original letters of the source language seems a sign of respect, a respect that consequently is denied the Hebrew language. It is even possible to interpret Pound using *neschek* transliterated into Roman script as in itself a form of 'contamination,' as if the concept has already 'infiltrated' the English language.

I stress that *neschek* is Pound's spelling, in contrast to *neshekh* as employed by for example Rabaté. This is worth remarking on, since Rabaté's spelling seems more accurate (not that this is the only case where Pound's philological exactitude in *The Cantos* may be questioned). In Hebrew, the word is written נֶשֶׁךְ, something that indicates a soft, guttural sound at the end. This word is derived from a root meaning "to bite" or "a bite," as Rabaté also notes (1986: 189). Pound's *neschek*, while undoubtedly intended to represent the same word, would seem to indicate a pronunciation with a hard *k* and the end, thus changing the meaning of the word, inadvertently referring to a different root. Pound's *neschek* seems not to refer to "usury" but to the Hebrew word נֶשֶׁבַע, which has an entirely different meaning, namely, "a weapon."

Even more striking is that the Hebrew language is used when the point is to name "usury," which must be said to be somewhat of the ultimate 'sin' in Pound's thinking about morality, while the Greek and Latin words come in to designate "the beautiful" (or "order") and "the decent." This risks being a bit unfair—for the poet does also include the Greek term for "usury," Τόκος. Still, there is no instance of any positive Hebrew word to be pointed out in "Addendum for C." Even if one can conceivably posit that Pound had a pious intention when using the Hebrew term *neschek*, is it not likely that the reader will associate some sort of disgust with it, compared with the use of Greek and Latin in the same fragment? This is possibly how Pound's editor interpreted Pound's Canto 52, the one other canto where the term *neschek* appears. Here it appears numerous times, but one passage is of special interest, since Pound's publishers, New Directions in the United States and Faber in the United Kingdom,

managed to have some of the lines crossed out in the published editions of *The Cantos*.³ Laughlin had originally suggested Pound remove the lines completely, but Pound insisted on them being printed in a crossed-out version (up to 1986—the later editions have removed the crossing out; see Barnhisel, 2005: 83). This is the passage in question:

Remarked Ben: better keep out the jews
 or yr/ grand children will curse you
 jews, real jews, chazims, and *neschek*
 also super-neschek or the international racket
 spécialité of the Stinkschuld
 bomb-proof under their house in Paris
 where they cd/ store aht voiks
 fat slug with three body-guards
 soiling our sea front with a pot bellied yacht in the offing,
 government full of their gun-swine, bankbuzzards, poppinjays.

POUND, *Cantos*, 52/257–8

Ben is Benjamin Franklin, while “chazims” is a version of the Yiddish word for “pigs.” Earlier in the same canto, a passage, also crossed out by Laughlin, goes on about “poor yitts paying for Stinkschuld / paying for a few big jews’ vendetta on goyim,” that is, poor Jews paying the price for rich Jews’ ‘revenge’ on the ‘Gentiles.’ “Stinkschuld” is again a codeword for Rothschild. The transliteration “aht voiks” for “art works” is Pound imitating supposedly ‘Jewish’ pronunciation. According to Hugh Kenner, Pound’s fury stems in part from a “pot bellied” Rothschild yacht anchored in the harbor of Rapallo, where Pound was living at the time (Casillo 1988: 260).

Once again Terrell is highly apologetic when commenting on this canto: He says that “Pound’s apparent intent is to deplore the way anti-Semites in the 1930s blamed all Jews, including poor ones, for the destructive financial practices of a very few” (1993: 200). This is quite a stretch. Even if one accepts this highly dubious explanation of Pound’s intention, seeing the way the poem actually stands on the page, one realizes that the Yiddish and Hebrew terms hardly function to give any positive connotation to anything Jewish whatsoever—on the contrary, it is as though they are linked to something sinful and unclean. Any attempt at denying that Pound was thinking along these lines is easily disproven. Let us

3 The lines crossed out were the sixth- to second-to-last lines in the quotation given here.

for example look at a passage from Pound's article "Race or Illness" (originally titled "Razza o malattia"), printed on March 12, 1944, in *Il Popolo di Alessandria*, one of the most important newspapers of the Salò Republic:

It is time to make an analysis. Hebrewism isn't race, it's illness. When a nation dies, Jews multiply like bacilli in carrion. Like an illness, there can be severe cases and lesser cases. The same Jews suffer from it in differing intensities, almost measles or smallpox. When aryan or half-aryans like Roosevelt and Churchill or Eden are stricken, they are real lepers. Analysis of blood can demonstrate the results.

Quoted from REDMAN, 1991: 243⁴

Rather incredibly, and although he considers this the "worst example of Pound's anti-Semitism," Tim Redman still claims that if "judged within the context of his time," Pound was "not a racist" (1991: 158). Casillo strikes me as closer to the mark when he says that even if racism and antisemitism "were far less significant in Italian Fascism than in Nazism," from the later 1930s on "Pound stands closer to the Nazi than to the Italian Fascist position on the issue of race," that is, in seeing race as "a biological fact of paramount importance" (1988: 136–7). Redman's point must be that Pound was not actively racist in the sense that he deemed people with colored skin to be less worth, or that he was not a proponent of "race hatred," as Burton Hatlen says, in his article on "Racism and Anti-Semitism" in *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, that he was not:

Although blacks are the principal object of racism in America, Pound never displayed animus against blacks, seeing them rather as simple, happy, natural folk, with a heightened mythic consciousness. We now regard such stereotyping as racist; but if racism implies race hatred, Pound's attitude toward blacks is not racist. In fact, Pound's views on blacks were relatively progressive: He denounced lynching and contributed money to a defense fund for the Scottsboro boys, the most famous victims of American racism during the 1930s.

2005: 252

Reading a passage such as this, one may wonder when merely denouncing lynching made someone "relatively progressive." The fact is that, although

4 Redman's translation.

perhaps not under the spell of “race hatred,” Pound held strictly segregationist views. This is evident in a letter he wrote on January 18, 1940, also quoted by Redman. In this letter it says:

By RACE I do not mean what's printed on a passport. The melting pot has been tried and FAILED. Some blends are O.K. but the others rot in three generations even when the mulatto happens to be good. [...] We want our Italians Italian; french french; ang/sax ang/sax; Dutch dutch. That is enough for any man, with a very occasional hybrid.

REDMAN, 1991: 196

In his study *John Kasper and Ezra Pound* (2015), Marsh quite simply treats Pound as a racist. One could of course argue that he thereby uses the term in a present-day sense, but this is contentious, since Marsh quotes Pound to the effect that “each race has its qualities,” that “no race can fully perform the function of another,” and that “any attempt to obscure racial character is anti-scientific” (2015: 10). Admittedly, such views do not necessarily constitute race hatred as such. But they certainly show how important the question of race was for Pound.

4 Ethnic and Eugenic Racism

In his aborted, half-page long essay “For the African=American Language” [*sic*], probably written in the 1940s, Pound wrote the following: “One race and one race only has fostered in America a speech softer mellow and fuller than the South midland and having a charm not inferior to the 18th cent[ury] phonetics preserved and tempered in our land, and that is the Negro race” (Marsh, 2005: 21). This statement is as such positive to the language of African Americans. The argument may be linked to Pound’s earlier admiration for the language of traditional societies, as evidenced for example in his 1930 essay “How to Write” (1996: 87–109). In both instances, the admiration seemingly implies that the languages in question *sound* beautiful. But as in the 1930 essay, this evidently does not mean that its practitioners are endowed with the ability to generalize, for example.

Marsh says that “Pound always sees African Americans as the truest Americans, that is to say as American as himself” (2005: 22). In short, according to Marsh, Pound had a “paternalistic fondness for black people” (154). Still, he must count as a supporter of “ethnic racism,” that is, the “belief that a race has certain distinguishing features and in-bred cultural practices” (73). Pound did

not accept Darwin's theory of evolution, and instead became influenced by Louis Agassiz, whom Marsh calls "the most influential scientific racist of the nineteenth century" (64) and whose views he compares to Hitler's. Under the influence of Agassiz, Pound believed that "dark skin and joyful physicality go together," that "Aryans" have "an innate sense of justice," while "Jews have big noses and [...] specialize in usury" (73). Subscribing to this line of thinking, Pound was, according to Marsh, of the opinion that people of African descent "were predestined to be farmers, not legislators," and that they were subservient to the "master races," namely, the Greeks (and their European descendants) and the Chinese (64). What singles Pound out from simply being an all-out white supremacist, Marsh argues, is that he saw not only "Aryans" but even the Chinese as a "culture-bearing race" (151).

As a contrast to ethnic racism, Marsh introduces a second form of racism, namely, "eugenic racism." He concludes that Pound's early antisemitism "is above all ethnic and cultural, not primarily prejudice on eugenic grounds" (75), and that this remains the case up through the 1930s. But by 1942, after having read the second volume of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in Italian, Pound was, says Marsh, "converted [...] to eugenics" (85). Marsh maintains that Pound's "main objection to Jews was cultural," at the same time admitting that "'culture' easily slides over to 'racial'" (86). The way I read "Addendum for C," it is a locus for precisely such a sliding, from the denunciation of usury as a cultural practice to a demonization of Jews as spreaders of illness. This illness *could* be read metaphorically, but Pound himself goes a long way to prevent such an interpretation by, in the "Addendum" itself, pointing to the need for poets to speak without using symbols or metaphors. All in all, "Addendum for C" seems much in line with the antisemitism present in Pound's wartime radio broadcasts from Rome, contemporary with the composition of the fragment.

Even in later cantos, Pound would seem to advocate "antiseptis," that is, racial segregation, and avoidance of race-mixing, for example in Canto 94: "maintain antiseptis, / let the light pour" (Pound, *Cantos*, 94/635). When Pound in a letter to William Cookson, possibly from 1959, makes a remark on UNESCO, we can observe a similar idea on what is arguably a more 'cultural' level:

Even the Victorian era with its formula: Greece for the arts, Rome for law, the Hebrews for religion was trying to preserve elements, the main elements of different cultures, not à la UNESCO, trying to melt out all distinctions and reduce the whole to a dull paste of common inhumanity (? and/or nucleosity?).

1991: 232

Importantly, Pound seems to be indicating that segregation is not solely important when it comes to race, but in all matters, as when he states that “nothing is more damnably harmful to everyone, black and white than misceg[e]nation, bastardization and mongrelization of EVERYthing” (quoted from Marsh, 2005: xi–xii). This *denial* of the value of *hybridity* is what is of special interest here. My claim is that this denial is operative not only at a political level but in Pound’s poetry as well.

Linguistic hybridity is a central characteristic of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939), a work Pound expressed deep reservations about—referring to it as “unimportant” on account of it being “an aimless search for exaggeration” (1978: 129)—after having been an important ally of Joyce’s when it came to agitating for *Ulysses* (1922) and getting the latter novel published. In *The Poet’s Tongues*, Forster makes the important observation that keeping the different languages distinct was more pressing for Pound than for Joyce. This I interpret as meaning that the language of Joyce’s late work seems to be some sort of *hybrid* on the morphological microlevel, while the languages used in *The Cantos* largely remain *combined in unaltered form*. It is as if Joyce created his poetic prose in any possible language, while Pound created his poetry in English, equipping it with borrowings from foreign languages, making *The Cantos*, as Michael Lee Warner suggests, “a work which does not seek a utopian reunification of language, but leaves languages as they are” (1986: xiv). We do not need to go to the lengths Warner does when he describes *Finnegans Wake* as a work where Joyce was “merely pasting together morphemes and phonemes in multilingual clusters, a cute, but extravagant relative of *chinoiserie*” (57) to see that where Joyce for example would construct words such as “mammamuscles” (2012: 15) or “meandertale” (18), to give but two example from the work’s first section, Pound on his part would let Greek and Chinese scripts stand there by themselves in his texts alongside his (admittedly often ‘slangy’) English.

Pound tended to splice together already existing text from various sources, where Joyce on his part *kneaded* each morpheme into new, composite words. In contrast to the multilingualism of *Finnegans Wake*, the multilingualism of *The Cantos* is in most cases better described as examples of Pound *juxtaposing* different languages in what is arguably a collage-like manner or having a sort of mosaic effect. The ‘Universal Language’ or inverted Esperanto of Joyce is fundamentally different from Pound’s multilingual work. While the multilingualism of *Finnegans Wake* is essentially *hybrid*, the languages in *The Cantos* remain in an important manner *unmixed*: The elements retain their independence even when put together.

5 Segregation in Theory and Practice

I do not agree with Marsh when he claims that Pound's "eclectic *Cantos*" is a poem where Pound "constantly brings together what his ideology concludes must be kept apart" (2005: 159). It is of course true in one sense that Pound "brings together" a variety of different languages and cultural expressions in *The Cantos*. But it seems to me that he does this precisely in order *not* to mix them. Even in his poetry, at least his mature poetry, he avoids hybridity. In other words, Pound's poetry is segregationist not only in its statements but also at the morphological microlevel.⁵

In her study *Learning to Be Modern* (1993), Gail McDonald sees Pound's youthful embracement of linguistic, literary, and cultural difference as a strategic maneuver: "As Pound gained confidence, he chose the strategy of celebrating difference. Having committed himself to study of foreign language and to the cosmopolitanism they reinforced, Pound felt superior to classmates content to live in only one culture" (2003: 14). Pound might have chosen to "celebrate difference" to enhance his career at a certain point. In fact, we may ask: Did he ever cease celebrating difference? Perhaps not. What is striking is that this celebration at a later stage went hand in hand with segregationist attitudes. Even Casillo, who generally pulls no punches in his analysis of Pound's antisemitism, grants that antisemitism was not important in Pound's thought before the late 1920s (1988: 5). When we come to the early 1940s, however, Pound's use of the Hebrew term *neschek* in "Addendum for C" is clearly testimony to an ethnic racism, and even arguably sliding over into a eugenic one.

There is a striking co-presence of segregationist theory and practice in Pound's work: In his prose he sees cultures as something that needs to be *kept apart* to be preserved; in his poetry he moves away from experimenting with a linguistic "melting pot" instead stressing the need to "leave languages as they are," as Warner puts it in his study of Pound's multilingualism (1986: xiv). Whereas the previous inclusions of foreign languages in *The Cantos* could convincingly have been interpreted as signifying appreciation for Otherness, in "Addendum for C" they now serve as emblems or icons for cultural and racial 'purity.'

5 One could perhaps argue that the very transliteration of *neschek* into Latin letters constitutes a sort of hybridity, but as I have suggested, it seems more fitting to see it as Pound's view of a form of contamination. The very parasitical quality attached to the Hebrew word for "usury" in "Addendum for C" shows how Pound saw the intermingling of cultures as contaminating 'pure' traditions. As such "Addendum for C" *mimes* the said contamination, only to function as a sort of exorcism.

“Addendum for C” represents what is probably the clearest expression of a shift in Pound’s poetics, introducing a phase where his poetry has clear affiliations with a segregationist idea of avoiding hybridity. One may ask whether there is not a danger that I am projecting Pound’s ideas about a segregationist political culture onto a text that continues to be a celebration of literary and cultural difference. I think not. This does not mean that I consider a defense of the value of reading Pound’s poetry to be impossible. But such a defense is dependent on an admission that Pound was a segregationist. Given such an admission, a defense could focus on what should be an obvious fact: Segregation in poetry and in society are two entirely different things.

Conclusion

This article suggests a solution to the paradox that Pound simultaneously embraced literary multilingualism and endorsed ethnic segregation. I have argued that even if the early Pound may have experimented with linguistic hybridity, the later Pound actively did not want to mix languages. “Addendum for C” marks a development in Pound’s multilingual poetry, approaching the antisemitic propaganda of his infamous radio broadcasts. This is not so much a question of how Pound’s poetry presents a stated opinion, but of how it presents the Hebrew term for “usury” as a parasitical term that has infiltrated the English language and needs to be exorcised. What this suggests is that multilingual poetry need not be only a cosmopolitan celebration of cultural and linguistic difference but may just as well be intimately linked to racist ideas.

When L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet Charles Bernstein said that “Pound’s work contradicts his fascism” (1999: 158), what he was referring to was not the multilingual character of Pound’s poetry but its paratactic and fragmentary character. In Bernstein’s opinion, this ‘un-fascist’ way of composing poetry stands in stark contradiction to Pound’s explicitly stated political opinions. One could easily imagine a similar defense of Pound’s poetry on account of its many multilingual aspects. Yet my analysis shows that Pound’s use of multilingual terms in a poem such as “Addendum for C” must count as instances of ethnic racism, if not also of eugenic racism.

Was Pound *celebrating* multilingualism as a cultural fact? No. A premise that multilingual literature represents such a celebration is, in my view, too often presupposed in present-day studies of literary multilingualism. The literary multilingualism often celebrated today might need to be regarded more critically than is sometimes done. Even as much as we may appreciate multi-

lingualism as a sign of an ethnically diverse society, a multilingual poem is not necessarily a celebration of such a society.

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Balkan, Creole, Other: Dislocating Contemporary Multilingualisms

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Abstract

Reading the language memoirs of Jhumpa Lahiri and Dubravka Ugrešić, this article investigates what it means to know or not know a language, particularly when that language is marked ‘foreign.’ The texts under analysis attend to languages that often fall under the rubric of ‘other languages’ and underexamined contact zones. Approaching the sociopolitical dominance of so-called global English and the literary marketplace of world literature, this article reveals the need to elaborate the concept of multilingualism through multiscalar reading practices that show the inter-imperial history of contemporary multilingualism.

Keywords

language memoir – translanguaging – foreign – inter-imperiality – racialization – world literature

Not all articulation and rejection of difference is the same, as not all difference is the same. Some differences carry more cultural capital than others; some differences are less universal than others; some differences are more disempowering and hurtful than others.

SHU-MEI SHIH, 2004: 28

Let us begin with a historical moment. In 1911, a U.S. Congressional report compiled by the Immigration Commission, titled *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, was

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published on the occasion of a shift in U.S. immigration: The new influx was comprised largely of immigrants from southeast Europe. The report attempted to fill the missing yet “important ethnical factors to be found among natives of eastern European countries resident in the United States” (U.S. Congressional Report, 1911: 1). While a new system of classification was deemed unnecessary as immigrants arrived from Poland and the Kingdom of Bohemia (what would become the Czech Republic), the report argued that the “old method of recording arrivals only by the country of their nativity was of little value in determining the ethnical status of such immigrants” as those from “Austria-Hungary, Russia, Turkey, and the Balkan States” (1911: 2). The list reflected empires and inter-imperial zones not usually under the purview of postcolonial studies, including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire.¹ Adopting the German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s five “great races” of humankind—formulated as “Caucasian, Ethiopian, Mongolian, Malay, and American, or, as familiarly called, the white, black, yellow, brown, and red races”—the *Dictionary* subdivided its conception of race using linguistic formulations (1911: 3). It asserted that the classification of language—specifically, the “language spoken by him or by his ancestors in the old home”—had the “sanction of law in immigration statistics and in the censuses of foreign countries” (3). Consequently, the report contended that classifying language was the sole method by which to accurately quantify immigration figures: “The immigrant inspector or the enumerator in the field may easily ascertain the mother tongue of an individual, but he has neither the time nor the training to determine whether that individual is dolichocephalic or brachycephalic in type” (3–4).² In this redescription of visible identity markers, language embodied more physical properties ascertainable by the so-called immigrant inspector than measurements of the skull, a task that purportedly required more training, precision, and time (see figure 1). In official use until the 1950s, the report made language the newfound overt marker of race and claimed that its classification lent convenience and efficiency to processing those deemed foreigners under the law.

This article investigates what it means to know or not know a language, particularly when that language is marked ‘foreign,’ when it carries the sanction of law. Foreign how? Foreign to whom? How does the conception of foreignness

1 In outlining her “inter-imperial method,” Doyle elaborates that the “*inter* of *inter-imperiality* refers to multiple vectored relations among empires and among those who endure and maneuver among empires” (2020: 4).

2 The report cites Müller’s *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1864) as foundational to its conception of race.

Dictionary of Races or Peoples.				
COMPARATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF IMMIGRANT RACES OR PEOPLES.				
Based on Brinton (cf. Keane).			People.	Ripley's races, with other corresponding terms.
Race.	Stock.	Group.		
Caucasian.	Aryan....	Teutonic....	Scandinavian:	I. TEUTONIC. H. Europæus (Lapouge). Nordic (Deniker). Dolicho-leptorhine (Kohlmann). Germanic (English writers). Reihengräber (German writers). Kymric (French writers). Part Alpine. II. ALPINE (OR CELTIC). H. Alpinus (Lapouge). Occidental (Deniker). Disentis (German writers). Cello-Slavic (French writers). Lappanoid (Pruner-Bey). Sarmatian (von Hölder). Arvernian (Beddoe).
			Danish.....	
			Norwegian.....	
			Swedish.....	
			German (N. part).....	
		Dutch.....		
		English (part).....		
		Flemish.....		
		Lettic.....	Lithuanian.....	
		Celtic.....	Scottish (part).....	
	Irish (part).....			
	Caucasian.	Slavonic....	Welsh.....	Part Alpine.
			Russian.....	
			Polish.....	
			Czech:	
			Bohemian.....	
		Illyric....	Moravian.....	II. ALPINE (OR CELTIC).
			Servian.....	
			Croatian.....	
			Montenegrin.....	
Slovak.....				
Armenic....	Slovenian.....	Part Alpine.		
	Ruthenian.....			
	Dalmatian.....			
	Herzegovinian.....			
	Bosnian.....			
Semitic....	Italic.....	Albanian.....	Part Mediterranean. III. MEDITERRANEAN. H. Meridionalis (Lapouge). Atlanto-Mediterranean and Ibero-Insular (Deniker). Iberian (English writers). Ligurian (Italian writers). Part Mediterranean. Part Teutonic.	
		French.....		
		Italian (part).....		
		Roumanian.....		
		Spanish.....		
	Hellenic....	Spanish-American.....		Part Mediterranean.
		Mexican, etc.....		
		Portuguese.....		
		Greek.....		
		Hindu.....		
Iranic.....	Gypsy.....	Doubtful.		
	Arabic.....			
	Hebrew.....			
	Syrian.....			
	Caucasus peoples.....			
Euskaric....	Finnic....	Basque.....	Doubtful.	
		Finnish.....		
		Lappish.....		
		Magyar.....		
		Bulgarian (part).....		
Mongolian.	Sibiric....	Tataric.....	Doubtful.	
		Turkish, Cossack, etc.....		
		Japanese, Korean.....		
		Mongolic.....		
		Kalmuk.....		
Malay.....	Sinitic....	Chinese.....	Doubtful.	
		East Indian (part, i. e., Indo-Chinese).		
		Pacific Islander (part).		
		East Indian (part).		
		Negro.....		
Ethiopian.	American (Indian).	American Indian.....	Doubtful.	
		American Indian.....		

FIGURE 1 Linguistic classification chart presented in the 1911 U.S. Congressional report *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*

change in relation to southeast European languages in particular? In relation to migration? In dialogue with the 1911 *Dictionary*, the article close reads two language memoirs that engage the dictionary as a form and thus participate in delineating the boundaries of certain languages: Dubravka Ugrešić's *Američki fikcionar* (*American Fictionary*, 1993), translated from Croatian into English by

Celia Hawkesworth and Ellen Elias-Bursac; and Jhumpa Lahiri's *In altre parole* (*In Other Words*, 2016), translated from Italian into English by Ann Goldstein.³

Each memoir positions the writers within triangulated and multidirectional linguistic networks ever shifting, depending on the racial field in which the writers position themselves and in which they are positioned by others at any given time. My analysis of these texts demonstrates the equal weight carried by the speaker, the setting, the language, and the positionality of speaker, setting, and language in better understanding specific forms of multilingualism. Indeed, the work of Lahiri and Ugrešić provide two variations on southern Europe; while Lahiri weaves Bengali and English into the fabric of Italian, Ugrešić brings together BCMS, Dutch, Russian, and English. Reading these two texts together—one in Italian, one in BCMS, both with other lives in English translation—highlights their often-neglected geographical proximity. Through a description of the linguistic nodes these literary texts map onto a relational field, this article recovers the gains and losses in the politics of naming (and not naming) Balkan forms of multilingualism.

In what follows, I review how the discussion of multilingualism has largely neglected southeast European languages. I then analyze Lahiri's and Ugrešić's relationship to language, specifically through their engagement with dictionaries. The stability and partiality that each author, respectively, identifies in the dictionary as a form says much about how they and their languages are positioned in the world and in the sphere of so-called world literature. While *In Other Words* treats the dictionary as authoritative, *American Fictionary* questions its performance of objectivity and challenges the stability of American English—and by extension, American Empire—as a default reference point that always already enters unchallenged even when multiple languages are at play and the critical perspective being worked through is translation.

The texts under analysis in this article attend to languages which often fall under the rubric of 'other languages' and underexamined contact zones to reveal the need to elaborate the concept of multilingualism through multiscale reading practices that show the inter-imperial history of contemporary multilingualism. Placing the work of Lahiri and Ugrešić in relation reflects how southeast European and South Asian languages, located in inter-imperial zones with their own specific histories and traveling diasporically across empires, reveal enduring linguistic hierarchies that serve as processes of racialization. Within

3 I refer to the language of Dubravka Ugrešić's memoir as Croatian—as it appears in its marketing—with the understanding that Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian (BCMS), previously 'Serbo-Croatian,' are the same language with regional varieties. For an analysis of linguistic references in the former Yugoslavia, see Pupovac (2012).

these hierarchies, BCMS and Bengali are positioned as more minor than Italian and more minor still than English. In its neglect of minoritized languages, the critical field of literary multilingualism risks perpetuating these hierarchies.

1 On Knowing ‘Other Languages’

In his 2016 essay titled “Another Way in the World,” Simon Gikandi poses a series of questions outlining newfound attempts to mainstream multilingualism in the study of literature:

What are the possibilities and limits of studying literature across languages and traditions? What does it mean for English, French, or Spanish to be creolized? What role do regional languages and their literatures play in globalization? What happens when we change the direction of comparison from north-south to north-north or south-south? How does literature work in multilingual situations? What is the future of minor literatures and less-taught languages? How does literature function in primarily oral cultures? What is the role of translation in the circulation of literary cultures in different periods and places?

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The questions interrogate geopolitically inflected language hierarchies and navigate uneven patterns of flow and disruption. This unevenness highlights the relevance of creolization—both as history in the context of the Caribbean plantation economy, or a “racial and cultural mixing due to colonization, slavery, and migration” (Lionnet and Shih, 2011: 22); and as theory, signaling “a mode of transformation premised on the unequal power relations that characterize modernity/coloniality” (Parvulescu and Boatcă, 2022: 4). Globalization, creolization, translation, and comparison are revealed to be co-constitutive forces in which certain languages become standardized (relevant; domesticated), while others become marginalized (foreign). Given that the largest publishing presses are headquartered in the United States while only 3 percent of texts are translated *into* English—the majority from French, German, Italian, and Spanish—still more questions arise about the unevenness of market distribution.

This unevenness raises at least two points. One relates to the attention that twentieth- and twenty-first-century forms of multilingualism have garnered in the past two decades following seminal works such as Lydia H. Liu’s *Translingual Practice* (1995) and Steven G. Kellman’s *The Translingual Imagination*

(2000): The work has largely concentrated on multilingualism in English, French, German, and Spanish. Despite the ever-encroaching dominance of these languages, however, multilingualism is global. In a field-defining text on multilingual German literatures, Yasemin Yildiz describes all languages as “multilingualized” (2012: 15). Kellman has argued that “linguistic purity is of course a chimera; English, Korean, and Arabic are each already mongrel, and creolization among existing languages proceeds wherever cultures touch and collide—which is to say, virtually everywhere” (2000: 15).

What *is* exceptional remains the endurance of the Enlightenment-era monolingual paradigm, which Yildiz correlates with the “insistence on identifying the individual with one language only—namely, the presumed mother tongue” (2012: 23). The potency of that paradigm depends on the spatial and temporal location of the languages under analysis. It is this potency that partly explains why the scholarship on east and southeast European multilingualism, despite its centuries-long history, is only now emerging. Situated in the Balkans and particularly in the historical territory of the newly nationalized Bosnia and Herzegovina, the work of Amila Buturović has shown that “Slavic variants, of which bosančica was Bosnia’s main script, coexisted with Latin, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew, Ladino, and Persian” (2020). In its recent history, the so-called native language of Yugoslavs—Serbo-Croatian—has been reframed and foreignized, brokered by the American empire and made official in Dayton and Paris. The language has been dissected in the Dayton Peace Agreement according to imperial legacies that trace racio-religious traditions: Bosnian (Muslim), Croatian (Catholic), Serbian (Eastern Orthodox).⁴ The absence—from the ongoing critical discussion on multilingualism—of these specific forms of multilingualism only exacerbates the increasingly more racializing politics of naming ‘on the ground.’

This foreignization of ‘other languages’ to the point of their absence from consideration brings me to the second point regarding unevenness. Until recently, scholarship has focused on levels of proficiency when attending to the work of multilingual writers, particularly those who have experienced migration. Juliette Taylor-Batty introduces her analysis of Anglophone modernist writers by acknowledging the “common assumption that writers have command and control over the language(s) they use, that they have ‘knowledge’ and ‘competence’ of words and structures, and that they displace linguistic ‘mastery’ and ‘skill’” (2019: 41). In dialogue with Emily Apter’s theory of untranslatability and Virginia Woolf’s essays on not knowing French and Greek, Taylor-Batty argues

4 On the term “racio-religious,” see Sharma (2016).

that it is the writers' stress on *not* knowing that makes newness—or art—possible. It is this “not knowing” that resists models of mastery and ownership. In a recent essay titled “On Not Knowing: Lahiri, Tawada, Ishiguro,” Rebecca L. Walkowitz elaborates that not knowing “brings visibility to the history of conflict and collaboration within languages and focuses the conversation on linguistic hospitality rather than linguistic ownership” (2020: 324).

On the one hand, given the openness to different engagements made possible by the resistance to ‘proficiency,’ scholarship has the potential to reach beyond nation-bound linguistic allegiances to examine the specific local and inter-imperial histories and legacies that constitute different degrees of foreignness within and among languages, including the so-called native language. On the other hand, the emphasis on “not knowing” grants attention to the same languages that were attended to in the first place—i.e., English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. A critical analysis of ‘not knowing BCMS,’ to name one example, poses a different ethical dilemma than ‘not knowing French.’ For one, Anglophone scholarship that critically engages with literature in BCMS (largely in translation) rarely contends with or acknowledges the absence of specific linguistic knowledge. Nor does it incorporate new literatures being produced in the region (in part due to a limited translation market out of BCMS into English, especially after the end of the ‘latest war’) or evaluate the so-called canon beyond an older generation of writers such as Danilo Kiš and Ivo Andrić. In turn, it becomes falsely acceptable to recycle the foreignizing tropes that render an entire region and its respective history unchanging and thus vulnerable to being perpetually boiled down to ‘ancient hatreds’ and ‘tribal warfare.’

2 Negotiating Foreignness

“[L]ocal” in whose terms? How is significant difference politically articulated, and challenged? Who determines where (and when) a community draws its lines, names its insiders and outsiders?

JAMES CLIFFORD, 1997: 19

In Other Words is an Italian and English translingual memoir published in 2016 by Vintage.⁵ The narrative follows Lahiri's experience of learning Italian. The Italian text appears on the verso side, English on the recto. Originally written in

5 For the historical development of the genre of translingual memoir and a comprehensive bibliography of primary source examples, see Besemeres (2022: 3–5).

Italian by Lahiri, it was translated into English by Ann Goldstein, whose oeuvre includes translations of the work of Elena Ferrante and Primo Levi. Despite Goldstein's renown, however, only Lahiri's name appears on the cover, accompanied by a photograph of the author sitting before a dictionary.⁶ In the English-language preface, Lahiri explains that outsourcing the translation allowed her to "protect [her] Italian" (2016: xiii); that the memoir is an "experiment" (xiii), a "choice" (xiii), and a "risk" (xiii); and that it "requires strict discipline" (xiv). Although Lahiri has since self-translated from Italian into English, she claimed that self-translating *In Other Words* would have disrupted the quality of rawness in her Italian: "[T]he temptation would have been to improve it, to make it stronger by means of my stronger language" (xiv). Solidifying the borders around her Italian, the text resists the imperative to write in English and conceptualizes the two languages as mutually exclusive, bordering on antagonism. To combat English's supposedly parasitic effects on Italian, Lahiri "instinctively felt" the need for a translator (xiv). While she feels "like a guest, a traveler" when she reads in Italian, writing in Italian makes her feel "like an intruder, an imposter": "Sembra un compito contraffatto, innaturale. Mi accorgo di aver oltrepassato un confine, di sentirmi persa, di essere in fuga. Di essere completamente straniera" (82) ["The work seems counterfeit, unnatural. I realize that I've crossed over a boundary, that I feel lost, in flight. I'm a complete foreigner" (83)]. "Unnatural" and "foreigner" commingle here, linking 'natural'—or 'native'—with a sense of belonging. In her collection of essays titled *Translating Myself and Others* (2022), Lahiri adds: "I write in Italian to feel free" (2022: 11). The words "intruder," "imposter," "unnatural," and "foreigner" unexpectedly converge with a sense of freedom. The list suggests there is a different *kind* of foreignness at stake here.

Dictionaries, or forms of writing that are always already negotiating boundaries and belonging, are central to the text. Two of the chapters in the book—titled "The Dictionary" and "Reading with a Dictionary"—explicate Lahiri's relationship with dictionaries. She describes the dictionary as a guide, as protection, as capable of explaining everything: "Diventa sia una mappa che una bussola, senza la quale so che sarei smarrita. Diventa una specie di genitore, autorevole, senza il quale non posso uscire. Lo retengo un testo sacro, pieno di segreti, di rivelazioni" (2016: 8) ["It becomes both a map and a compass,

6 In Lahiri's recent collection of essays titled *Translating Myself and Others* (2022), Goldstein remains unnamed in Lahiri's reflections on *In Other Words* even as she clarifies that, unlike a large part of the present collection, the memoir was not self-translated: "I recounted this experience [of writing directly in Italian] in *In altre parole*, my first book in Italian, later translated into English as *In Other Words*" (Lahiri 2022: 3).

and without it I know I'd be lost. It becomes a kind of authoritative parent, without whom I can't go out. I consider it a sacred text, full of secrets, of revelations" (9)]. As a language memoir, *In Other Words* serves as a personalized dictionary—or, as Lahiri and Goldstein put it, “una sorta di autobiografia linguistica, un autoritratto” (212) [“a linguistic autobiography, a self-portrait” (213)]. Reflecting Lahiri's experience of being doubled, words are doubled on the page.

At first, the book associates foreignness with Italian, the language she learns “unnaturally,” as she says—meaning formally—in various periods of her life: as a graduate student of Renaissance studies, with a private tutor in New York, then later as she begins writing in Italian, and later still, translating in Italian. Biological metaphors for language extend to reproductive frameworks—especially to motherhood. Although her inherited language, Bengali, occasionally surfaces in the text, when it does so, it takes the position of a ‘mother tongue’ and consequently risks succumbing to marginalization.⁷ Lahiri's confrontation with her limited Italian vocabulary conjures up memories of learning Bengali as a child: “Mi correggono, mi incoraggiano, mi forniscono le parole che mi mancano. Parlano con chiarezza, con pazienza. Così come i genitori con i loro bambini. Come si impara la lingua madre. Mi rendo conto di non aver imparato l'inglese in questa maniera” (24) [“They correct me, they encourage me, they provide the words I lack. They speak clearly, patiently. Just like parents with their children. The way one learns one's native language. I realize that I didn't learn English in this fashion” (25)]. Once Lahiri begins *reading* English, the latter becomes “una matrigna” (146) [“a stepmother” (147)]. This linguistic web continues to thicken. Italian appears as a lover. When translating between Italian and English, she herself assumes the role of a mother—“di due figli” (118) [“of two children” (119)]. Each metaphor renegotiates agency with regard to which language makes demands on her and which she herself chooses. Lahiri's relationship with Bengali is largely inherited, familial; with English, pragmatic, historical, and familiar; with Italian, affective.⁸

An intersecting series of metaphors describes language as a place to inhabit and renders relevant the pairing of metaphorical reproduction with forms of imperial conquest, a pairing that challenges the theorized link between ‘not knowing’ and ‘unpossessing’ language. While Lahiri sees every language connected to “un territorio geografico, un Paese” (18) [“a geographi-

7 On the biologization of the term “mother tongue” situated in the historical *longue durée*, see Wiggan (2018).

8 For a relational reading of bilingualism and affect, see Pavlenko (2006).

cal territory, a country" (19)], the book foregrounds metaphorical places that are more connected to a conception of being in limbo, of being "nowhere" in particular. She likens her experience of learning Italian to "entering an empty room" and swimming in a lake "Senza salvagente. Senza poter contare sulla terraferma" (4) ["Without a life vest. Without depending on solid ground" (5)]. She invokes the metaphor of a bridge: "In mezzo a ogni ponte mi trovo sospesa, né di qua né di là. Scrivere in un'altra lingua somiglia a un percorso del genere. La mia scrittura in italiano, così come un ponte, è qualcosa di costruito, di fragile" (96) ["In the middle of every bridge I find myself suspended, neither here nor there. Writing in another language resembles a journey of this sort. My writing in Italian is, just like a bridge, something constructed, fragile" (97)]. The metaphors imply not only a rite of passage but a right *to* pass, reflecting the agency with which Lahiri chooses, learns, and engages with 'foreign' languages. The room Lahiri enters is not occupied; she swims without gear in a contained lake; the bridge, however fragile, supports her journey, and there is no guard. Near the conclusion of the memoir, Lahiri stands at a 'crossroads,' asking herself whether she will "Abbandonerò l'inglese definitivamente per l'italiano" (228) ["abandon English definitively for Italian" (229)].

Where does this leave Bengali?

In each metaphor there is a shared falling away of Bengali as Italian gains prominence and English holds despite all resistance. And yet this feeling of being suspended appears earlier in the text—in a rare reference to Bengali in relation to English: "Ho dovuto giostrarmi tra queste due lingue finché, a circa venticinque anni, non ho scoperto l'italiano. Non c'era alcun bisogno di imparare questa lingua. Nessuna pressione familiare, culturale, sociale. Nessuna necessità" (152) ["I had to joust between those two languages until, at around the age of twenty-five, I discovered Italian. There was no need to learn that language. No family, cultural, or social pressure. No necessity" (153)]. There is more in this 'jousting' metaphor related to the imperial and colonial dominance of English, especially in her parents' India. Let us return here to her metaphor of English as "stepmother" and how this relationship to English unfolds precisely when she begins *reading* in English. Another 'crossroads' consequently comes into view in the difference between oral language, on the one hand, and written, on the other. Lahiri cannot write or read in Bengali. Although writing in Italian is for her a 'voluntary exile,' her migration away from Bengali cannot be framed as a choice, especially in the context of the legacies of British colonialism in India and her parents' migration from South Asia to Britain, then to the United States (2016: 37, 227). Her exile from Bengali mirrors overarching language hierarchies that render Bengali more minor than Italian and more minor

still than English.⁹ One also has to account for a politics of naming languages in postcolonial South Asia that overlap with the naming of BCMS in southeast Europe. The politics of naming 'Italian' has its place in this discussion as well, one that traces eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West European raciolinguistic ideologies.

Lahiri's preference for writing is also not merely a trace of her being a writer. An alternative interpretation is offered in a chapter called "The Wall." While shopping in a boutique with her family, Lahiri is approached by a saleswoman with that suggestive question: "Where are you from?" The explanation Lahiri offers—that her family moved to Rome from New York—leaves the salesperson dissatisfied, imploring: "Ma tuo marito deve essere italiano. Lui parla perfettamente, senza nessun accento" (2016: 136) ["But your husband must be Italian. He speaks perfectly, without any accent" (137)]. Her spouse, meanwhile, has barely uttered a word. The exchange devastates Lahiri, who reflects, "Ecco il confine che non riuscirò mai a varcare. Il muro che rimarrà per sempre tra me e l'italiano, per quanto bene possa impararlo. Il mio aspetto fisico" (136) ["Here is the border that I will never manage to cross. The wall that will remain forever between me and Italian, no matter how well I learn it. My physical appearance" (137)]. In Italy, she enters a different racial field. Kinships outside Italian are racially imposed on her through her appearance as a Brown woman of color. Her class empowerment conflicts here with what has been constructed in the imperial *longue durée* as racialized disempowerment.

Her racialized displacement from *speaking* Italian intensifies her alienation from Bengali as it draws her even more toward *writing* in Italian. Writing in Italian allows her to write outside the assumed borders of autobiographical forms. And yet the reverse takes place: Writing in Italian, a language she describes as being foreign to her, she retreats into herself, into the form of autobiography; writing in English, she ventures outside herself, creating diasporic South Asian characters assumed to be autobiographical. Even so, writing serves as an antidote, an exercise in passing, "per rompere il muro, per esprimermi in modo puro" (142) ["to break down the wall, to express myself in a pure way" (145)]. Writing restores a certain uninhibited freedom for her: "Quando scrivo non c'entra il mio aspetto, il mio nome. Vengo ascoltata senza essere vista, senza pregiudizi, senza filtro. Sono invisibile. Divento le mie parole, e le parole diventano me" (142, 144) ["When I write, my appearance, my name have nothing to do with it. I am heard without being seen, without prejudices, without

9 The 1947 Partition of British India resulted in differentiating West Bengal from East Bengal through racio-religious demarcations—one minoritizing Muslims, the other minoritizing non-Muslims, respectively.

a filter. I am invisible. I become my words, and the words become me” (145)]. The textual is not purified of racialized difference, however. Readers always already bring racialized expectations to their experience of a book through the author’s name, the text’s title, its marketing, and so on. These expectations are particularly relevant when an author calls a book their first and only autobiography, as Lahiri has referred to *In Other Words*.

As much can be said about what appears on the pages of *In Other Words* (English and Italian) as not (Bengali). In *The Invention of Monolingualism*, David Gramling discusses the process of (intentional or unintentional) censorship at play in the contemporary world literary market: “Writers of prospective world literature today are nourishing a kind of modest critical *passing* in global literary monolingualism—a disposition that is aware of the attenuating formal constraints on multilingual appearance in the public and symbolic order” (2016: 24). He calls these constraints “the products not of language systems as such but of the sanctioned circulation of certain kinds of translatedness at the expense of others” (24). One could ask what *In Other Words* would look like as a bilingual edition from Bengali into English. From Russian into English? From BCMS into English? In the experience of learning languages and reflecting on the process of so-called acquisition, *whose* and *which* forms of multilingualism are attended to?

3 Denaturalizing ‘Native’ Language

If you would just learn English; no, unaccented English; no, the right variety of English. If you would just enter the country the right way; no, get in line and traverse a pathway to citizenship; no, act like a good citizen. This is a racialized social tense of the always already and never quite yet.

JONATHAN ROSA, 2019: 15

American Fictionary is a language memoir that brings BCMS, Dutch, and Russian under the purview of global English. Each essay in Ugrešić’s collection muses on a single English-language word in her “American fictionary”—including entries such as “Shrink,” “Couch Potato,” and “Harassment.”¹⁰ Originally written in Croatian, the book was published in 1993 by Konzor Press in the newly nationalized Croatia, republished a year later by the London-based press Jonathan Cape in an English translation by Celia Hawkesworth, and rereleased

10 To clarify, the entries appear in English in both the BCMS original and in the English translation.

in 2018 in a co-translation by Hawkesworth and Ellen Elias-Bursac under its current title by the U.S.-based Open Letter Books.¹¹ This section investigates how this memoir entangles a different constellation of languages and disrupts any given language's status as 'native' or 'foreign'—as any of the biologized terms commonly used to construct language hierarchies.

After Ugrešić is forced into exile in the 1990s for publicly criticizing the Croatian government's increasingly choking nationalism, she finds herself migrating *among* languages and places in multidirectional and fluctuating directions. When Yugoslavia dissolves, she flees from Zagreb to Amsterdam. A temporary teaching position at Wesleyan takes her to Middletown, Connecticut, shortly thereafter, from where she routinely visits New York. Her migration experience—by extension, her linguistic experience—resists simplification and any linear developmental arc imposed by the conventional post-war autobiography. Her sense of having become “stranac od nigde, od svugde” (1993: 73) [“a foreigner from nowhere, from everywhere” (2018: 67)] speaks to the foundational erasures of her identity following Yugoslavia's dissolution. Contrasting the transnational coordinates comprising Lahiri's map of diasporic experience and travel, Ugrešić's are translocal; cities, neighborhoods, and specific communities are central to her worldview. Dalia Kandiyoti names translocality the “diaspora sense of place,” the circulation of boundary-crossing languages, identities, and collective memories “*against the grain* of enclosure” (2009: 5). *American Fictionary* thus highlights the porousness of nation-bound borders. Moreover, the absence of a stable point of origin poses a radical challenge to the autobiography form.

For a writer whose country of birth and language have been variously erased or reframed due to violence, dictionaries—those foundational texts defining the borders of a language—become unstable. The smallest details don high stakes. Ugrešić stops at the entry for the word “bagel”: Webster offers the description of “doughnut-shaped,” implying, Ugrešić notes, “*da je doughnut stariji od bagela, a to je, pak, prokleta laž!*” (1993: 175) [“the doughnut is older than the bagel, and that is a damned lie!” (2018: 166)]. In the source text, there is a direct engagement with the multiple languages, which appear in italics: “*Bagel* ima ne samo svoju dugu (židovsku) tradiciju nego i svoje stilske podvarijante u mnogim zemljama svijeta, napose slavenskim. To kozmopolitsko tijesto poznato je kao *publica* u Dalmaciji, kao *bublik* u Rusiji, kao *devrek* u Makedoniji i Bugarskoj” (1993: 175) [“Not only do bagels have their own long (Jewish) tradition, but they have stylistic subvariants in many countries, especially Slavic.

11 The 1994 translation appeared under the title *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*.

This cosmopolitan form of baked good is known as the *publica* in Dalmatia, the *bublik* in Russia, the *devrek* in Macedonia and Bulgaria” (2018: 166)]. The correction dramatizes how a text formally categorized as a reference source participates in its own forms of invention. This intervention calls forth what Massimiliano Spotti and Jan Blommaert identify as the imperative shift from a stable idea of “-lingualisms” to that of “linguaging”—a “set of empirically observable practices in which ‘languages,’ ‘codes,’ ‘lects,’ and so forth, emerge as ideological upshot of communicative development” (2016: 167). Like the theoretically productive instability reflected in the word “linguaging,” which acknowledges how “the ‘language’ we produce is always a work in progress,” Ugrešić’s reading of the dictionary uncovers the sticky process of its coming into being (Spotti, 2016: 171). She emphasizes the proximity of diction to fiction—a slip of the finger on the keyboard that can only occur within English, showing that the essay collection is inconceivable without her awareness of the entanglements of language.

The word “dictionary” is prominent among what she calls her “izbjegličkoj prtljazi” (1993: 13) [“refugee luggage” (2018: 9)] a recurring metaphor in the collection. For Lahiri, the dictionary alleviates the uncertainty embedded in migration; it serves as an objective source she uses to ground her diasporic experience and linguistic knowledge. For Ugrešić, in contrast, the dictionary contributes to that very uncertainty. Given that the dictionary acts as a basis for the entire collection, she cannot remove herself from the parasitic effects of English. The minoritization of BCMS compounded by war requires knowledge of or translation into English. In other words, her experience requires specific paperwork—a formal visa. She has to prove herself even in her “homeland” where she is a ‘native’:

I shudder at the thought of my old homeland where I’ve become a stranger, which no longer even exists, I shudder at the thought of its ghost, I shudder at the thought of the new country where I’ll be a stranger, whose citizenship I have yet to apply for, I’ll have to prove I was born there, though I was, that I speak its language, though it is my mother tongue, I shudder at the thought of this old-new homeland for which I’ll have to fight in order to live there—as a permanent émigré.

2018: 180¹²

12 This essay only appears in the Open Letter Books edition and thus only in English.

The BCMS word for “stranger” can also be translated as “foreigner”—an important distinction given that “foreigner,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, comes to denote someone who speaks a foreign language.¹³ Ugrešić must show proof even as she proclaims her own nativeness, and becoming is politically and violently imposed on her as a precondition for belonging. English is not necessarily a chosen language but one that imposes itself on her.

It is in this way that Ugrešić formulates a ‘writing from nowhere’ with rampant borders. In a concluding scene, she finds herself suspended in an airport, rife with surveilled checkpoints and borders.¹⁴ She describes her transformation: “Ja sam ljudska larva. Savit ću ovdje, na ničijem prostoru, svoje prirodno gnijezdo” (1993: 190) [“I am a human larva. Here, in this no-man’s-land, I’ll weave my natural nest” (2018: 181)]. Even in this manifestly unnatural environment, the comparison invokes biological terms, summoning metaphors that overlap with those of *In Other Words*. When a Croatian flight attendant takes her order, Ugrešić blushes upon realizing she responded in English (182). The utterance “Orange juice, thank you” effectuates a sense of shame: of speaking in English in order to *perform* foreignness, of attempting to resist an assumption, of answering in a language that commits a sort of violence to the space *between* the two speakers. It appears in English in the BCMS, manifesting a form of foreignness in its resistance to translation. Ugrešić performs language as a way to pass as *foreign*, aware of the fluctuating and relational politics of language. She has the privilege of being able to pass as a White woman in the United States, but on the backdrop of her forced exile, encompassing as it does several places and languages, she cannot pass linguistically. Her attempt to ‘correct’ herself leads her to utter a question in BCMS that she did not want to ask: “Where’s the life vest?” (182). The question has no place in the exchange. Forms of foreignness reveal themselves differently in BCMS and English.

The commodification of language gives form to an omnipresent and alienating self-consciousness and accounts for a crucial difference between *In Other Words* and *American Fictionary*. Ugrešić contends, “Na granici ću one preostale promijeniti, kao novac, u neke druge riječi. Ili u neku drugu šutnju” (1993: 191) [“I’ll change what words I have left at the border, like money, into other words. Or another kind of silence” (2018: 182)]. Not *in* other words, but *into* oth-

13 The *OED* entry motivated me to explore further. The word for “foreigner” in BCMS—“stranac”—led me to the dictionary of turcisms in Serbo-Croatian, where the word appears as “jabanac”—from the Ottoman Turkish “yabancı.” In Japanese, 野蠻人 (*yabanjin*) means “barbarian” or “savage”—which presents a fascinating inter-imperial linguistic history welcoming further research.

14 See Apter’s “Checkpoints and Sovereign Borders,” in *Against World Literature* (2013).

er words. The multilingualism described in *American Fictionary* eclipses forms of nation-bound linguistic desire and agency. It becomes clear how analyzing a text's multilingualism without describing the specific relations between languages in the context of their usage overlooks gradations of privilege, of foreignness, that remap languages onto an ever-changing inter-imperial relational network.

4 Multilingualism *with* Race: Or, Notes on Balkanization

Much ink has been spilled about Babel—so much so that I venture to say only the term “balkanization” comes close, if not for the risk of verging on hyperbole. Nevertheless, in the effort to theorize multilingualism *with* race, this section attends to the uses of “balkanization.”

Eloquent, for example, has been an essay written by one of the most visible practitioners of comparative literature, Emily Apter. In a chapter titled “Balkan Babel: Translation Zones, Military Zones,” included in *The Translation Zone* (2011), Apter begins by noting Maria Todorova’s well-known resistance to “regional stereotyping that equates ‘Balkan’ with ethnic cleansing; bloodletting; a perpetual underground; mongrel regionalism; ‘semi-developed, semi-colonial’ Europe; ‘an incomplete self of the West’” (Apter, 2011: 130). Apter’s essay proceeds to challenge Todorova’s warning:

There is nonetheless, in representative literary works from southeastern Europe, a pronounced thematic focus on border wars and fractious linguistic copopulation. It is from these works that I take my cue in treating “Balkan” as a synonym for what occurs semiotically and socially when dialect or marginal world languages are in a war of maneuver unmediated by a major language of position.

2011: 130

Apter’s essay presents as representative two novels: Ismail Kadare’s *The Three Arched Bridge* (1978), translated into English by John Hodgson in 1997, and Ivo Andrić’s *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), translated into English by Lovett F. Edwards in 1959.¹⁵ Reading these two novels leads Apter to conceptualize “Balkan babble” as a “condition of failed semantic transmission,” and “Balkan Babel” as “a tower of Babel turned on its side to form a hapless bridge intended

15 Andrić is misspelled as “Andrić” throughout the essay. One should also note the age of both texts.

to ford the unbridgeable gulf between Europe and the so-called East" (2011: 130). For Apter, "language wars" cement "balkanization" as a synonym for what Todorova identifies as "regional stereotyping": "In the Balkans, the vindication of a language, or even a word, may be a lethal affair, and many writers have fastened on this problematic as key to understanding not only regional factionalism, but also the broadly applicable symptomology carried by the term Balkanization" (Apter, 2011: 133).

Let us briefly return to the 1911 *Dictionary*, which summarizes its findings on the Balkans in this way: "The savage manners of the last century are still met with amongst some Serbo-Croatians of to-day. Armed conflicts are not uncommon. Political feuds are especially bitter. Murders resulting from private vendettas occur frequently in some localities. Illiteracy is prevalent and civilization at a low stage in retired districts" (U.S. Congressional Report, 1911: 47). Balkanization is not merely a faulty metaphor; the deployment of the term forecloses much-needed relational readings. In the introduction to the co-edited volume *Balkan as Metaphor*, Dušan I. Bjelić argues that "Balkan identity has been a potent channeling tool in the cultural exorcism of civilized Europe" (2002: 10). Indeed, the tool remains potent *beyond* the variegated boundaries of Europe. This process of cultural exorcism implicitly summons what Shumei Shih formulates as "culturalism," wherein "what is national in the Third World is turned into ethnic culture during immigration, and, similarly, even those who are outside Western metropolises are metaphorically and oftentimes practically minoritized" (2004: 23).

As a comparatist working through relationality, one might also note Édouard Glissant's use of the term "balkanization." In "Creolization and the Americas," a lecture he delivered at the university of the West Indies, Mona, in 1992, Glissant referenced balkanization as a metaphor for the effects of occidental colonization of the West Indies and the Caribbean.¹⁶ Contending with the idea that the Caribbean is the "Mediterranean of the Americas," Glissant argued that the Mediterranean Sea "concentrate[es]" while the Caribbean Sea "diffracts," an "archipelago-like reality which does not imply the intense entrenchment of a self-sufficient thinking of identity" (2011: 12). In an essay that draws on Glissant's lecture, Guido Snel offers the term "levantinization" in reference to the Balkans, where the "semantic field opened up by 'Levant' implies a European gaze looking from a perceived and unfixed center toward a semi-colonial subaltern, who at the same time cannot be set aside as non-European" (2020:

16 The publication of the transcribed lecture does not specify the transcriber's identity and whether translation was involved, as one can presume from previous work that the lecture was delivered in French.

73). Snel distinguishes levantinization from creolization by engaging with a deep historicization of local geographies.

In each metaphor—balkanization, creolization, levantinization—multilingualism is center stage. I understand the myriad appearances of the term “balkanization” as invitations for relational comparison that performs a much-needed reckoning with processes of racialization, which I have named ‘forms of foreignness.’ To do otherwise in the absence of a deep awareness of the languages in the work under analysis is to entertain the risk of perpetuating racialization. Moreover, in the case of this article, to treat the work of Lahiri and Ugrešić separately (whereby Croatian would be read within a southeast European sphere and Bengali within a South Asian one) would be to miss an opportunity for alternative solidarities. An important intervention is to bracket the discourse on nativeness and the biological term “mother tongue” as both succumb to marginalization. There are always already multiple displacements and hospitalities within any given linguistic relationship. A myriad of linguistic complexities and histories are ironed out when we name languages and literatures or, worse, exclude them altogether. Working with the historical premise of a relational network that accounts for an expanded spatial and temporal scale becomes conducive to reimagining the established nation-bound formulation of literatures and languages. Attending to southeast European forms of multilingualism further expands our view of a multilingualism otherwise, to echo Manuela Boatcă’s (2020) formulation of “Europe otherwise.” Diasporic multilingual literatures and their scholarly analysis can serve as antidotes—to use Lahiri’s and Ugrešić’s understanding of writing as antidote—to constructed hierarchies and imposed forms of foreignness.

The shared privileges afforded to the exemplary work of Lahiri and Ugrešić end with time (given that they are contemporaries) and space (given that the nation-states they purportedly ‘represent’ in their work are divided merely by the narrow Adriatic Sea). The identities into which they were born, the racial and gender categories that are imposed on them, the conditions under which they have migrated (forced) or traveled (chosen), the languages they have learned (or not) and how and why, the languages they work in, the ways that work appears in translation, the markets they circulate in—each of these factors, which can collectively be called forms of foreignness, significantly contributes to the vastly different positionality they assume as writers in the world and as writers of ‘world literature.’ Their categorization often relocates these stakes using nationalized and unevenly racialized demarcations. In place of racialization alone, which too broadly applied risks decentering anti-Black racism, I have offered ‘foreignness’ as a theoretically productive correlative. Writers and texts make claims on language, and languages make claims on writers

and texts: These constitute drastically different processes that cannot be elided under analysis. The inequity apparent in how certain languages are framed, approached, and analyzed, or neglected altogether, risks perpetuating the logic of the 1911 *Dictionary*.

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Post-monolingual Anglophone Novels

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's The Dragonfly Sea and Karina Lickorish Quinn's The Dust Never Settles

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Abstract

A range of recent anglophone novels is committed to weaving connections between English and other languages, thus turning English into a language of encounter. Activating both multilingual and translingual configurations, these novels are what one might—in line with Yasemin Yildiz (2012)—call “post-monolingual.” Post-monolingual novels are powerful expressions of the plurality of languages that coexist within seemingly homogeneous spaces. Fluidizing the boundaries between languages, these novels pose intricate challenges for literary studies, which concern all major dimensions of the literary text, that is, its poetics, its modes of reading, and the logic of publishing. The article explores the complexities at the heart of post-monolingual novels, offering close readings of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019) and Karina Lickorish Quinn's *The Dust Never Settles* (2021).

Keywords

post-monolingualism – anglophony – multilingualism – translingualism – Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor – Karina Lickorish Quinn

1 The Post-monolingual Anglophone Novel, Today

Critical, experimental, and subversive engagements with the English language have long since pervaded postcolonial and transcultural literatures, but a range of more recent novels introduce new variations to these experiments: Rather than writing back to the English language, they are committed to weaving connections between English and other languages, small and large, and thus turning English into a language of encounter (see Young, 2009).¹ Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novels *Dust* (2014) and *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019), Xiaolu Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2007), Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives* (2020), as well as Karina Lickorish Quinn's *The Dust Never Settles* (2021) are some examples that evince the interest in multilingual relationality. Without ignoring the lasting influence of institutionalized language classifications and the power differentials inherent in English, these novels oppose the largely Eurocentric idea of a discrete and unitary idiom as well as related concepts of language possession. Thriving at the porous boundaries between languages and performing multiple exchanges between them,² they turn seemingly discrete languages into a multi- and translingual zone, which attests to histories of cultural interaction across speech communities and makes room for pluralized forms of identification. More specifically, these novels use the imaginative space provided by fiction to stage the interdependencies of English with other languages and to show that even the global lingua franca, the hyper-central language of our modernity, owns up to the condition of relationality.

Following Rebecca Walkowitz, one might call these novels “post-anglophone,” designating a corpus of texts written in English, while at the same time questioning what counts as anglophone and what falls outside its orbit: “The ‘post’ in post-anglophone registers histories of language contact and amalgamation. Post-anglophone works neutralize the longstanding opposition between metropolitan literatures and world literatures by challenging the homogenization of English at any scale” (2021: 97). For Owuor, Roy, Lickorish Quinn, and Vuong, the anglophone and the multilingual are however not mutually exclusive but codependent. Their writings render concrete Amir Mufti's claim that English “is never written or spoken out of hearing range of a number of its linguistic oth-

1 I use the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘transcultural’ anglophone in a broad sense to reference those authors who were “pushed or pulled into anglophony” either by colonial legacies or “the economic and political logics of the present” (DeWispelare, 2017: 8).

2 Helgesson and Kullberg's (2018) concept of translingual events as a reading practice that registers traffic across and along linguistic boundaries is pertinent here.

ers" (2016: 160), questioning where one language ends and another one begins. Rather than being 'post-anglophone,' the novels by Owuor, Roy, and Lickorish Quinn are therefore what one might call 'post-monolingual': They energetically illustrate that the anglophone has always been more than one language (see Helgesson and Kullberg, 2018: 139) and that English only exists in relation.³ Activating both multilingual practices (i.e., practices which bring together various languages, while upholding their specificities) and translanguaging configurations (an inherently mixed and pluralized language, a third language that fuses linguistic elements to an extent that they can no longer be tied back to a named language), post-monolingual novels put pressure on the monolingual paradigm and respective reading practices. Opening up standardized language to the transformative force of other languages and thus creating a shared zone full of semiotic and material possibilities at the edges of languages, they call for reading practices that accept unintelligibility, uncertainty, and opacity of unownable languages (see Apter, 2013: 328) as an integral part of engaging with literary texts.

In this respect, these postcolonial and transcultural novels clearly chime with Yasemin Yildiz's understanding of the post-monolingual, which references "a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself" (2012: 5), while constantly being confronted with multilingual language practices. Post-monolingual novels are powerful expressions of the plurality of languages that coexist, sometimes peacefully, sometimes antagonistically, within seemingly unified and homogenous spaces, whether in the postcolony or the diaspora. Evoking what Francesca Orsini (2015) calls the "multilingual local," they encapsulate a multi-layered dynamic between various languages, which profoundly unsettles the homogenizing force exerted by monolingual norms and captures the shifting "*thrown-togetherness*" (Baynham and King Lee, 2019: 7) of language beyond territorial origin and geographical fixity. The multilingual local attunes us to the ways in which multiple languages mingle in specific locales *and* how they disperse across territories; it highlights that the global and the local are always co-constitutive, interdependent, and mutually transformative: While global languages, such as English or Spanish, can be understood "only from specific vantage-points" (Orsini, 2015: 352), seemingly local ones, such as Quechua, are to a greater or lesser degree marked by the global and typically point beyond the nativist.

Post-monolingual anglophone novels therefore offer an opportunity to trace some of the contacts English entertains with other languages and to undo the "implausibly unitary idea of 'English'" (DeWispelare, 2017: 4); they reveal the situated, specific, small, and particular actualizations of English, while also

3 In a footnote, Walkowitz (2021: 114) also employs the term "post-monolingual" works.

conjuring up the circulation of English across the world. Moreover, they show that English is, after all, not only a cosmopolitan or even a ‘killer language’ but also, and often simultaneously, a localized, small, and intimate idiom (see Neumann, 2021).⁴ But, we should note, these multi- and translingual practices are rarely uncontested and might even turn out to be dangerous or illegitimate (see Blommaert et al., 2012). After all, as Yildiz helpfully remarks, the post-monolingual marks “a field of tension” in which the monolingual paradigm perseveres, frequently discrediting border-transgressive linguistic practices, up to the point that respective speakers are denied social recognition and participation in the public sphere. Multi- and translingual practices in postcolonial and transcultural literatures should therefore be read against the normativities of monolingualism, be they related to the legacies of colonial language policies, to postcolonial power agendas, educational institutions, the demands of host countries, or the requirements of the international book market.

It is clear that post-monolingual novels pose intricate challenges for literary studies, challenges that concern all major dimensions of the literary text, that is, its poetics, modes of reading—or a more general readability—, and the logic of publishing. In this article, I will offer sample readings of Owuor’s novel *The Dragonfly Sea* and Lickorish Quinn’s *The Dust Never Settles* considering these interrelated dimensions: Each interpretation will first examine the poetics of post-monolingualism, focusing on the aesthetic potentiality of literary language—in other words, its specific “affordances” (Levine, 2015). Second, I will explore the readability of these texts, asking what it means to read beyond the monolingual paradigm—and what it means for different readers (see Tidigs and Huss, 2017; Helgesson and Kullberg, 2018). And, third, I will take a brief look at the “mediating factor” (Brouillette and Thomas, 2016: 511) of the nature of literary production, exploring the implications of writing in English at a time in which the book market has turned into a veritable ‘anglo-sphere.’

2 The Poetics of the Post-monolingual

Literature, Jacques Derrida (1992: 42) stresses, is marked by a “paradoxical structure”: On the one hand, it is characterized by a referential dimension to the physical world, which imbues it with a sense of implicated worldliness; on the other hand, literature’s fictionality, its creativeness, and its use of poetic forms put the represented language and its worldliness playfully under

4 The sense of locality does not preclude the possibility that English serves as a vehicle that enables connections between languages across territories.

erasure and create a sense of ambiguity that invites readers to enter into an open dialogue with the text. This paradoxical structure also marks literary language, which is creative, poietic, and non-mimetic. Literary language refers to, but never simply registers, actual language and respective speech acts. It is a stylized and aesthetically condensed idiom and therefore, as noted by Caroline Levine (2015: 10), “lays claims to its own forms—syntactical, narrative, rhythmic, rhetorical—and its own materiality—the spoken word, the printed page.”

The specific nature of literary language impacts my understanding of literary multi- and translanguaging: While these practices frequently evoke the linguistic realities from which they derive, they can never be reduced to pre-given linguistic contexts and practices. To be sure, post-monolingual novels may, for instance, refer to Kenya’s multilingual locals, where English, Kiswahili, and Luo intermingle. But importantly, these novels also transgress existing traditions to probe new connections between different languages, large and small, and to mine the performative, affective, and material dimensions of language. The novels by Roy, Owuor, and Lickorish Quinn use languages as creative resources for making worlds, for establishing novel linguistic assemblages, and for imagining speech collectivities beyond identitarian paradigms and delineated territories. They are, in their creativity and self-reflexivity, particularly suited to harness the instability of what Ferdinand de Saussure calls *parole* to change the seemingly fixed structures of *langue* and fluidize institutionalized borders between languages. In so doing, they invite us to inquire into what languages or rather practices of ‘linguaging’ (see Chow, 2014; following A.L. Becker, 1991) can do, how they affect our relations to the world and to others, rather than what language is. Arguably, it is precisely the creative nature of literary multi- and translanguaging—language as a verb rather than a noun—that underlines the necessity of a “multilingual philology” (Dembeck, 2017). Such a philology, Till Dembeck, among others, suggests, should account for the localized worldliness of multi- and translanguaging, while also taking seriously the literariness of language that exceeds given contexts. Literature’s context-specific situatedness therefore does not preclude possibilities of reading texts in multiple, extra-territorial, non-synchronous, and non-native ways, which inevitably unleash the semantic and material surplus of literary multilingualism.

The literary texts by Kenyan writer Owuor have, from the beginning, been preoccupied with the aesthetics and politics of ‘linguaging.’ Experiments with exophony, multi- and translanguaging, ‘multiscriptalism’ (see Schmitz-Emans, 2021), as well as translation and untranslatability pervade her award-winning short story “Weight of Whispers” (2006) and her debut novel *Dust* (2014).

While “Weight of Whispers” explores the relation between linguistic dispossession and citizenship, *Dust* is a revisionist historical piece of fiction that fuses English and Kiswahili to unearth some of the repressed memories of colonial and postcolonial Kenya (see Neumann, 2020). But it is her novel *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019) that is marked most pronouncedly by a post-monolingual poetics, rendering present a plethora of languages, such as English, Kiswahili, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Mandarin, Portuguese, and French.⁵ The novel’s complex multi- and translingualism emerges from the world’s swirl of languages, which are tied, sometimes closely, sometimes loosely, to Kenya, and more specifically to the small island of Pate, where the novel’s plot is mainly set. Multilingualism is thus intimately linked to the smallness and particularity of place, contesting its conventionalized association with the metropolitan. In her essays, Owuor time and again draws attention to the complex multilingualism that shapes Kenyan realities and that thoroughly undoes Western ideas about the congruence of nation, language, and identity:

English, Swahili, and the more than sixty further languages spoken in Kenya do not constitute self-enclosed entities generating mutually exclusive worlds of meaning, but form a cultural and linguistic contact zone where multivocality is the order of the day and languages themselves are changed, reformed, revived, added onto, and sustained in new and vigorous ways.

2015: 141

Owuor refutes notions of language as a separate and quantifiable entity in favor of a ‘multivocal’ translanguage, which includes many different languages with open boundaries. The notion of bounded languages here gives way to a dense contact zone in which multiple languages interact and mix, undoing repressive categorizations and making it possible to “think plurality without a number” (Helgesson and Kullberg, 2018: 139). Placing English within Kenya’s multilingual local, Owuor questions the idea that the use of English betrays a colonial mindset and a desire to be acknowledged by Western readerships. For her, English is as much a local language as it is a cosmopolitan one, and her writings compel us to discard these dualistic frameworks altogether. Conversely, Owuor’s fiction illustrates that in Kenya and East Africa Kiswahili serves as a translocal, possibly even cosmopolitan, language that comes with its own

5 I would like to thank Owuor for generously sharing with me her thoughts on *The Dragonfly Sea*.

power agenda and claims to recognition, reminding us that so-called global hierarchies between languages are locally specific.

In *The Dragonfly Sea*, Owuor condenses Kenya's multilingual local by a complex and multilayered aesthetics that conjures ever new languages to explore how they enable, or prevent, relations between people from across the world. Drawing on the generic conventions of the coming-of-age novel but extending them to accommodate multiple nonhuman agencies, *The Dragonfly Sea* focuses on Ayaana, a young girl living on the small island of Pate, off the coast of Kenya. Ayaana grows up at the side of her mother, Munira, and eventually finds a father in a sailor named Muhidin, who, after years of troubled traveling, returns to Pate. Jointly, they form a community of ex-centrics, a community that, just like the sea that is so central to the novel's plot, is constantly in flux and serves as a springboard for gauging practices of hospitality in a transcultural world. Foregrounding South-South and South-East (rather than South-North) relations, it is the Indian Ocean that connects "the Lamu Archipelago's largest and sullenest island" (Owuor, 2019: 2) with East African, Arab, Indian, Persian, and Chinese communities. In a constant flow, the sea brings people, goods, languages, and practices from all over the world to Pate, and it is largely from these changing positionings of individuals in the world from which the novel's dense multilingualism emerges. For the main characters, Ayaana, Munira, and Muhidin, hospitality toward others also entails linguistic hospitality, that is, an openness toward other languages and, as compellingly described by Derrida in *Of Hospitality* (2000 [1997]: 35), a willingness to listen to others in whatever language they might speak.

Owuor grants language a crucial role in the plot, even imbues it with a sense of agency, as language entangles different characters with one another to create spaces of intimacy and closeness, but also of surprise and astonishment. In this anglophone novel, Ayaana and her mother time and again switch to Kiswahili to converse about some of the more urgent matters: "*Ayaaaana! Haki ya Mungu ... aieee!*" The threat-drenched contralto came from the bushes to the left of the mangroves. '*Aii, mwanangu, mbona wanitesa?*'" (Owuor, 2019: 5). Extrapolating the spaces between languages, the novel incorporates a range of Kiswahili words, idioms, and songs, which are at times translated and at others left untranslated. They punctuate the novel as intermittent reminders of what one might, referencing Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), call the "singular-plural": They throw into relief the symbolic and material singularities of language, while also drawing attention to relationality of languages. Crucially, these idioms and phrases are frequently evoked in intimate, emotionally charged, and affectively disturbing moments, either expressing a sense of proximity between characters or registering the embodied and sensual dimension of lan-

guage. When Ayaana plays in the ocean's shallows, she sings a "loud song of children at ease":

Ukuti, Ukuti
Wa mnazi, wa mnazi
Ukipata Upepo
Watete ... watete... watetemeka...

OWUOR, 2019: 16

Only by switching from one language to another, flowing into them and stitching them together, can the characters articulate the complexities of affective experiences and related forms of being in the world.

Owuor's novel conjures and curates languages to express the richness of world experiences, which resist being translated into one global idiom. When the aging and "world-bruised" (10) seaman Muhidin returns to Pate, he carries with him the ghosts of the past, but also the secret knowledge of faraway places, be they East African, Arabic, or Indian. He willingly shares what he has learned with Ayanna, trying to still her hunger for knowledge: "basic classical mathematics, geography, history, poetry, astronomy, as mediated in Kiswahili, English, sailor Portuguese, Arabic, old Persian, and some Gujarati" (43). At Muhidin's side, Ayaana discovers the poetry of Hafiz, "[f]irst in broken Farsi, followed by his Kiswahili translation" (44), but also exuberant Bollywood films, and each of these discoveries leaves its trace in the anglophone novel: "*Haathi Mere Saathi*. [...] '*Chal chal chal mere haathi, o mere saathi*'" (45). What is vital here is not so much the meaning of words but the eventfulness of linguistic plurality arising from the rapid shifts between languages and the fact of their coexistence, even if mediated through the anglophone. Much later, when cultural missionaries from China arrive on the island and reveal a genealogical connection between Ayaana and the "immense" Chinese "Admiral Zheng He" (115), Mandarin enters Pate's multilingual local, recalling old transcultural connections and forging new ones. More than fifty years before Columbus, the explorer Zheng had already commanded large-scale expeditions, seeking to establish trade networks between East Africa and China. The revelation "of the intimate 'lines' of connection that linked Pate to China" (154) gives Ayaana, now "the Descendant," the opportunity to study in China as an official guest of the government, which, according to the narrator, seeks to "excavat[e], prov[e], and entrench [...] Chinese rootedness in Africa" (396). Ayaana embarks on an Odyssean journey across the Indian Ocean, and once aboard the *mv Qingruli/Gulong*, she starts learning Mandarin: "the words for 'red,' 'white,' 'black,' 'blue,' and 'orange' [...]: '*Hong se, bai se, hei se, lan se, cheng se*.' [...]" Later in the

day, Ayaana memorized these colors. She drew pictograms on scraps of paper: 红色, 白色, 黑色, 蓝色, 橙色” (240).

Step by step, the novel frees languages from their institutionalized categorization and elaborately weaves them into the same fabric to facilitate mutually transformative relations: While showcasing the particularity of idioms, *The Dragonfly Sea* simultaneously reveals entanglements between them that irrevocably change the status of English. Constantly being confronted with other languages and bent according to their characteristics, English is turned into a localized, internally pluralized idiom, which flourishes in a multilingual environment. The kind of multilingualism that Owuor's novel models therefore chimes with Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook's (2012: 444) provocative suggestion to “return to monolingualism, but a very different monolingualism [...] that has at its heart an understanding of diversity that goes beyond the pluralism of multilingualism.” Just like the many multispecies ecologies that the novel sketches, the multilingual poetics provides an opportunity to rethink the validity of bordering acts, including the strategies through which such acts acquire their validity and transparency. Languages are shown to be fluid, porous, and mobile practices, and consequently, to take up Naoki Sakai's (2009: 73) suggestion, they should be compared to water rather than to apples and pears. This understanding accords with Owuor's theoretical approach to language, as expressed most succinctly in her essay “O-Swahili: Language and Liminality” (2015). Here, she stresses that “[l]anguage [...] is not necessarily loyal to its place of origin despite the best efforts of its guardians” (144). Instead of reconfirming borders, Owuor's novel foregrounds the liminal, unexpected spaces into which “languages uncontrollably trickle”⁶: “*Liminal* spaces imagined as necessary passageways before language can take root, and find belonging and form in a land far from its place of origin. Language entering thresholds and disrupting, transforming, informing experience” (143). This is a radically innovative claim that accentuates the generative and unruly force of language as a practice of thresholds and an emergent activity that is imbued with spatial agency: not tied to a fixed place, languaging creates new spaces, zones of interaction, and togetherness beyond established mappings and boundaries.

Just like *The Dragonfly Sea*, Lickorish Quinn's literary texts also challenge us to come up with new understandings of the anglophone in the twenty-first century, insisting that it can never refer to a unified entity.⁷ Lickorish Quinn is a Peruvian British writer whose works engage with the Latinx literary traditions

6 Owuor in a personal conversation, March 30, 2022.

7 I would like to thank Lickorish Quinn for an inspiring conversation on her work.

that have thus far been strongly associated with the United States. She writes in English and Spanish; but first and foremost, much like Gloria Anzaldúa, a pioneer in the use of Spanglish as a literary language, she is keen on experimenting with bi- and translanguaging. These practices are committed to overcoming normative concepts and repressive monolingual practices that gloss over the realities of those who grow up with several languages.

Lickorish Quinn's short story "Spanglish" (2016) was published in *Asymptote* journal, a translation-centered digital journal dedicated to "facilitating encounters between languages" (*Asymptote*, n.d.: n.p.). The highly self-reflexive story makes use of bi- and translanguaging to trace what it means to live in two languages in the "darkest Midlands del United Kingdom" (Lickorish Quinn, 2016: n.p.). For the autodiegetic narrator, Spanglish, a creative and multilayered translanguage, is her mother tongue and in self-consciously claiming it as a language of literature, the narrator rigorously refutes institutionalized versions of 'a' language. In Lickorish Quinn's short story, English and Spanish can no longer be separated into discrete entities, and established terms such "native tongue," "foreign language," "first language," or "second language" are stripped of their validity. She presents English as part of Spanish and Spanish as part of English to the effect that they form a new, third language. While deploying both English and Spanish, the story purports the idea that, spoken and written together, they flow into a hybrid idiom, "Spanglish," a kind of language that signifies linguistic multitude, which cannot be counted (see Sakai, 2009). "Spanglish" illustrates Derrida's claim that "we only ever speak one language," a claim that entails the paradox that "we never speak only one language" (1998: 7). But, resonating with the understanding of post-monolingual practices as "a field of tension" (Yildiz, 2012: 5), the narrator-protagonist also acknowledges the dissent that her languaging is met with. Authoritative institutions and educational policies attempt to impose the monolingual paradigm on her and to cement 'either/or' concepts of language. More than once, the narrator is required to justify her wayward use of language: "But I am also capable—more than capable, of speaking either/or as well . . . Of isolating one tongue, reigning it in, and communicating unilingually with the other" (Lickorish Quinn, 2016: n.p.). And yet, even as the narrator asserts her mastery of monolingualism, she immediately undoes its normativity by slipping back into her translanguaging tongue, which now becomes even more untamed: "Perhaps I should have started speaking to you with, 'Hwæt! Mínnge gehýrað ánfæaldne ge þóht? ¿Pero, en serio, no me preocupa que el castellano sea engullido por el inglés? ¿Qué Shakespeare devore a Cervantes? ¿Qué el español sea chaucereantizado?'" (n.p.) Against the forcible imposition of monolingual practices, the narrator self-consciously chooses linguistic mobility and fusion, also drawing attention to the fact that the very

development of literary traditions hinges on creative transfer and translation. Old English, Spanish, and English are brought into interaction here, and the references to *Beowulf*, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Chaucer remind readers that literary practices and languages always emerge from multiple influences.

Multilingualism as well as translation practices are powerful catalysts of innovation rather than anormal, derivative, and secondary activities, as Walkowitz (2015: 5) has so cogently shown. The evocation of *Beowulf*'s Old English and Chaucer's multilingualism in particular contests notions of linguistic purity and respective homogenous understandings of national literature. Heterogeneity and difference are shown to exist within every single language, recalling Édouard Glissant's (1997: 119) dictum of the "internal multiplicity of languages." In this way, the quote above adds an important historical dimension to Lickorish Quinn's portrayal of transcultural subjectivity as it reminds us that the monolingual paradigm is a fairly recent invention. Energetically moving from monolingual norms to post-monolingual practices, "Spanglish"—as a story and language—cuts across the established historical and territorial compartmentalization of language to make room for connectivity, while also revealing the tensions between individual languaging and institutional language politics. The emerging translanguaging is valued in terms of its creative, transgressive, and liberating potential; but it is also the means by which the narrator-protagonist expresses herself in everyday life. It is a language whose validity is not derived from rules but from its malleability. Thus, acquiring an existential status for the narrator-protagonist's self-positioning, Spanglish is claimed as a local language of the "darkest Midlands del United Kingdom" (Lickorish Quinn, 2016: n.p.).

In her debut novel *The Dust Never Settles*, published in 2021 with Oneworld, Lickorish Quinn also brings English and Spanish into dialogue to create an elaborate post-monolingual poetics. Importantly, she opens this dialogue between these two former Euro-colonial languages to make room for Quechua, an indigenous language primarily spoken in the Peruvian Andes and the South American diaspora, as well as for Japanese and Luba. The two latter languages, *The Dust Never Settles* shows, have entered Peru's multilingual local through histories of slavery and migration. The novel, a piece of revisionist historical fiction thriving on so-called magic realism, traces Anaïs Echeverría Gest's return to Lima, where she handles the sale of her childhood home, La Casa Echeverría. Having lived in Great Britain, the birthplace of her father, for the last years, the return to the house of her childhood conjures a flow of memories—ghosts of the past, as the homodiegetic narrator repeatedly calls them (see Lickorish Quinn, 2021: 10, 13, 120, 220, 332)—which unearth her troubled family history. The memories consistently blur the boundaries between the individual and

the collective, but they also undo conventional distinctions between history and legend, here largely anchored in pre-Hispanic, Andean traditions. Taking their point of departure from the fate of the seventeen-year-old “long-suffering maid to the Echeverrías” (Lickorish Quinn, 2021: 50) Julia, who fell out of a window to her death, Anaïs’s memories largely revolve around her mother’s ancestors, their secrets and brutalities, and gradually reveal their involvement in plantation slavery. Interwoven in Anaïs’s memories are those of Julia, which are told in separate chapters, numbered in Spanish. Modeled on what Dimock calls “deep time” (2001), that is, a non-Eurocentric, multilayered temporality that spans the distance between centuries and continents, it is particularly Julia’s memories that retrieve Peru’s troubled histories. Implicating different cultures, such as Spain, Africa, China, and Great Britain, these histories reach back to the rise and fall of the Inca empire and extend to the civil war in the late twentieth century, an armed conflict between the government and Maoist groups, which caused the death of thousands of people, the majority of which were Quechua. The repeated references to ghosts, which, in Derrida’s hauntology (2006 [1994]) are turned into ethically charged figures of remembrance, are a gripping reminder of the continuing presence of the imperial past and the need to remember it in a creative way.

The poetically dense and elaborately plotted novel is remarkable for the ways in which it evokes the complexities of both individual and collective languaging, which bear witness to the traveling of idioms across time and space. While individual and collective languaging are closely intertwined, the distinction is nonetheless important for it shows that English assumes different roles in the mediation of literary worlds. On the individual level, the use of English and its recurrent interspersions with Spanish mostly reflects the bilingual reality of the main protagonist, who has relocated from Peru to England and back again. It is through Anaïs and her family that English enters Lima and thickens the already extant multilingual reality. The centrality of English in the portrayal of Peruvian realities highlights that languages, tied to individuals rather than to institutions, travel in unpredictable ways and with no respect for given boundaries. According to Orsini, such trajectories are transformative interventions for they create “significant geographies” (2015: 346), that is, geographies beyond and beneath the national, which propel new forms of belonging. But it is also English that marks the protagonist as an outsider, an “*¡Im-pos-to-ra! ¡Im-pos-to-ra! ¡Im-pos-to-ra!*” (Lickorish Quinn, 2021: 170), showing how even the hyper-central language of our globalized age can become a stigma.

Conversely, the integration of Spanish cultivates a sense of locality and illustrates how Anaïs navigates her way through Lima: “*¡Pues, sí! That’s what I told him. Le dije, ¡Pedro, eres un imbécil! ¡Así es! He is useless! Idiota. Idiota total.*” (164)

In *The Dust Never Settles*, the local is always connected to the transcultural and, while grounded and specific, evinces the mobility of language. Spanish, in the novel, points beyond Peru and toward Spain, and, as it recalls brutal histories of colonization and dispossession, it also serves as a reminder that there is more than one colonial language. Importantly, within the multilingual local, the distinctions between so-called foreign and native languages are never settled. Italicization, throughout the novel, is used in an inconsistent manner; at times it is English words that are italicized, at others Spanish; frequently, the novel does without italicization (“Tías called me blanca, palida, clarita del huevo and never let me bathe in the sun. While Leandro was tostadito, quemadito como un frijol, I was pale”; 129). In this way, *The Dust Never Settles* largely refuses to foreignize one language at the expense of others. The shifts between Spanish and English, frequently occurring within one sentence, defy the notion that languages are separable, countable, and sovereign entities and that multilingualism “is merely the accumulation of several ‘monolingualisms’” (Hiddleston and Ouyang, 2021: 6). It is only by switching back and forth between languages and by freely mixing them that Anaïs can express her lived experience, thus making multilingualism her first language and natural tongue.

In *The Dust Never Settles*, linguistic border-crossing assumes socio-political urgency as it triangulates English, Spanish, and Quechua to trace histories and encounters that reveal tensions within the postcolonial nation-state. The triangulation offers a means to evoke Peru’s multilingual local and to bring attention to a culture and language—Quechua—which is often associated with the minor, the particular, and the distinctively local (see Figlerowicz and Figlerowicz, 2021: 1032). But Quechua used to be the main language of the Inca empire, stretching over large parts of South America and reminding us of the historical variability of linguistic hierarchies. And even today, Quechua, spoken by approximately ten million people across South America and diasporic spaces in the Global North, is the largest indigenous language. In *The Dust Never Settles*, Quechua words and phrases are integrated to make available the repertoire of Inca mythology and Andean cosmologies, such as those related to the apus (mountain spirits) that haunt the plot. Unfolding multiple layers of meaning, Quechua also conjures the brutal fights between Peru’s indigenous populations and government forces, into which Julia, resurrected saint, seeks to intervene: “*The pebbles told the stones told the hillocks told the hills until the tayta mountains conversed from peak to peak about you. But it started with the dust. Uchuyypuni uchuyypuni—even the smallest particles can be great. ‘Imam sutyiki, taytay?’ Julia asks*” (Lickorish Quinn, 2021: 321). Quechua here flaunts a sense of difference that points toward unsettled conflicts within the nation, while also expressing a desire for recognition.

Rather than merely celebrating untranslatability, the triangulation of Spanish, Quechua, and English also enacts transfers of sounds, meanings, and histories; it can therefore possibly be read in a future-oriented way, that is, as a form of civic mediation between opposing forces. Importantly, it is through English that Quechua and Spanish are brought into contact, suggesting that English is capable of mediating linguistic diversity. But English, in this text, is not the transparent, neutral, and seemingly universal mediator that Mufti thematizes in *Forget English!* (2016). Rather, the confrontation with both Spanish and Quechua shatters the illusion of its autonomy, universality, and self-presence and turns it into a relational idiom, espousing what Rey Chow calls a “condition of more-than-one” (2014: 59). While such relationality does not fully neutralize the (market-oriented) dominance of English, it still underlines that restorative remembering involves mutual interpenetration and a kind of connectivity that affects all entities involved.

3 Reading Post-monolingual Literature: Affective and Humble Reading

How to read post-monolingual literatures? Who might be the ideal reader of novels such as *The Dragonfly Sea* and *The Dust Never Settles*? And which language competences are required to read these texts? These are some questions that literary multilingualism has been concerned with since its inception. In recent years, scholars such as Walkowitz (2015), Julia Tidigs and Markus Huss (2017), as well as Jane Hiddleston and Wen-Chin Ouyang (2021) have convincingly questioned the assumption, implicit or explicit in a number of research contributions, that multilingual literature is primarily directed at multilingual readers. Reading, after all, entails more than understanding, and, in a similar vein, language cannot be reduced to its communicative function. It might indeed be one characteristic of post-monolingual literature to scramble and undo the very notion of the ideal, intended, or implied reader, typically conceived of in the singular, altogether, since it relies on claims of language mastery and cannot account for the multiplicity of meaning, resulting from localized and frequently discrepant readings. At a time in which books travel faster than ever and readerships are increasingly diverse, conventional distinctions between native and foreign readers have lost their plausibility precisely because these distinctions assume a sense of cultural homogeneity and geographical fixity (see Walkowitz, 2015: 6, 21). But, as noted above, literary configurations of multi- and translanguaging always go beyond given linguistic contexts, and while literary languaging may reference the multilingual local, it also transgresses it to invent new literary idioms, reaching out to other spaces. To do justice to

literary multilingualism, it is therefore necessary to conceive the relation between text and readers in much more dynamic, mutually transformative ways and inquire into how literary texts put “creative demands” on their readers (Hiddleston and Ouyang, 2021: 6). Hiddleston and Ouyang are right in reminding us that the role of readers “is subversively reconfigured to involve a form of co-creation based at once on partial understanding and on [their] own creative imagination” (2021: 6). Even more emphatically, it is necessary to acknowledge that literary texts have the capacity to affect readers in different ways and possibly even bring new literary communities into being.

Aware of the transcultural networks into which the circulation and reception of their texts are implicated, Owuor, Vuong, Guo, and Roy address diverse audiences across the anglophone world. Their texts resonate with the claim formulated by Tidigs and Huss that “each reader, with her or his specific language skills, reacts to and interacts differently with the languages of the text” (2017: 211). Another way to put this is to say that literary multi- and translanguaging inevitably produces differential effects: While these literary strategies might create communicative transparency, closeness, and proximity for some readers, they can give rise to puzzlement, irritation, and possibly even opacity for others (see Helgesson and Neumann, 2021: 226; Walkowitz, 2015: 21).⁸ The acceptance of multi- and translanguaging’s differential working allows us to overcome the binary between readerly exclusion and inclusion: Even if readers only partly understand the languages evoked in a text, they can relate to them in other, more sensual ways. Language, after all, also has a material side and an affective dimension, which cannot, in any straightforward manner, be translated into meaning, but which matters and signifies nonetheless (see Tidigs and Huss, 2017: 213). Languages come with specific sounds and rhythms, and once put onto the page, they also have a strong visual appeal, grounded in their “Schriftbildlichkeit” (Krämer, Cancik-Kirschbaum, and Totzke, 2012), that is, their typographical shape and configuration on the page. Partial incomprehension and the ensuing sense of uncertainty may be productive precisely because they attune readers to the intractable yet powerful materiality of language, which has frequently been ignored or downplayed in Western thinking. Materiality, Vittoria Borsò (2014: 132) explains, is “a remnant or excess, [...] a supplement that acts much like friction in the formation of meaning, or noise in communication. It exists as a trace of the potentiality that precedes form but is not its point of origin, something that cannot be integrated into the order of [...] the sayable.”

⁸ These effects may change, overlap, and clash during the reading process.

To take seriously the potentiality of materiality, the analysis of the affordance of post-monolingual poetics needs to be complemented by an engagement with what C. Namwali Serpell (2014: 26) calls “resonance,” referring to the affective “energies, intensities, and vibrations” of language, which are not restricted in their “direction, duration,” or “degree.” Noise, vibrations, the potential sounds and rhythms of possibly incomprehensible language, as well as the typographical visuality of writing are sensual experiences that resonate through animating readers’ affects and curiosity, inviting them to form associations and relations that are not fully comprehensible. Multi- and translingual configurations might therefore best be understood as inducements to consider language in relation to sensual and embodied experiences. What Nathan Snaza in *Animate Literacies* (2019: 133) writes about language in general has therefore particular relevance to literary multilingualism: Once no longer “reduced to simply a transaction of meaning [...] language cannot be thought without thinking touch, contact, materiality, and corporeality.” While always prone to exoticizing linguistic otherness, forms of “Fremdschriftlichkeit” (Schmitz-Emans, 2021), that is, of hetero- or multiscriptalism, enhance such affective intensities. The Chinese pictograms, which we find in Owuor’s novel, may compel readers to grapple with the frictions between the visual and its possible meanings. Multiscriptalism, Schmitz-Emans holds (2021: 243), stages an intensified encounter with linguistic difference, hovering between the sense and the sensual conveyed by any script. The Chinese pictograms in *The Dragonfly Sea* give rise to a sense of immediacy and presence typical of the visual, while simultaneously remaining distant and enigmatic. While conducive to staging relations between scripts, exo-graphic experiments also reconfigure the alphabet as an expression of alterity, showing that the production of meaning and the semblance of presence rest on differential relations. The affects evoked by partial incomprehension therefore go beyond forms of alienation and deformation, which some scholars consider one of multilingualism’s major effects: Affects initiate a change “in physical sensation, in corporeal orientation” (Greenwald Smith, 2011: 163) and provide an opportunity for multisensual engagements with linguistic difference and plurality. Importantly, this is not a reified, monolithic otherness, but, as suggested by Serpell’s thematization of affect (see 2014: 18), a kind of difference that emerges from the shifting and dynamic play between the known and the unknown, the transparent and opaque. The mixing of languages in both *The Dust Never Settles* and *The Dragonfly Sea* may move and affect readers “beyond, beneath and beside” (Sedgwick, 2003: 8) discursive signification precisely because they are compelled to traverse varying zones of comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, familiarity and surprise (see Helgesson and Neumann, 2021).

Thus understood, the difference and potential incomprehensibility that comes into play through literary multi- and translingualism in both *The Dragonfly Sea* and *The Dust Never Settles* may unfold ethical effects, such as they are prominently addressed by Glissant's notion of opacity. The Caribbean French philosopher develops the concept in the context of his *Poetics of Relation* (1997) to defend the right of cultural others, in particular of people of color, to linguistic opacity, obscurity, and inscrutability. According to Glissant, Western societies almost obsessively seek to render cultural others transparent and employ language politics, that is, an enforced monolingual standard, as a major means of achieving such transparency. Against these linguistic expectations, Glissant (118–20) invokes the right to opacity, claiming that opacities must be preserved to the effect that the “internal multiplicity of languages” (119) be revealed and seized as an opportunity for cultural relationality. The multilingual and multiscriptal configurations of *The Dragonfly Sea* and *The Dust Never Settles* make a case for accepting a sense of difference, unpredictability, and puzzlement inherent in language and for refraining from translating this difference into familiar idioms. In one way or the other, all readers of the novels will have to struggle with some kind of opacity. As language remains unclaimable, post-monolingual novels have the potential to promote what Marta Figlerowicz and Matylda Figlerowicz (2021: 1032) call “humble readings”: “If neither rejected nor forced into a golden cage of understanding and interpretation, multilingual literature can prompt more humble readings. Just as a multilingual text does not claim ownership over style, a reader can accept less possessive forms of relating with texts and languages.”

4 Post-monolingual Literature in the International Book Market

At a time in which the international book market is heavily dominated by the Anglo-American publishing industry and several media conglomerates, the use of literary multi- and translingualism cannot be decoupled from the interests of brokering agents in pursuit of capital, both in its symbolic and economic forms. Sarah Brouillette and David Thomas (2016: 511) therefore have a point in asking literary scholars to attend more rigorously to the “mediating factor of the nature of the production of culture,” arguing that its ignorance inevitably leads to a reductive understanding of the “object; that is, some crucial dimensions of the world-literary itself perhaps cannot be understood in the absence of analysis of the global production of literary works targeted at selected readerships.” Jeremy Rosen (2020: n.p.), reflecting on the implications of Brouillette and Thomas's claim for anglophone literature, goes a step further by positing that “the Global Anglophone’ signifies nothing more accurately

than the literature that is written or translated into English, and produced and circulated globally via that industry.” As Brouillette and Thomas intimate, wisely, the influence of the international book market and respective acts of consecration are not secondary or external forces, coming *after* the process of writing. Instead, they are formative factors that ineluctably inscribe themselves in the literary text. Hence, even approaches that are primarily interested in the poetics of a text should factor in the influence of the publishing industry. In different, though interrelated, ways Brouillette (2007) and Walkowitz (2015) have illustrated that writing with an eye to the market does not necessarily amount to the rehearsal of well-established aesthetic formulas that secure facile global circulation. To the contrary, a number of contemporary writers have devised various strategies to take up the demands of the international book market creatively, turning them into a resource for inventing new poetics, such as the self-reflexive staging of translational processes.

In line with these observations, critics have analyzed the imbrications of multilingual literatures with the global publishing industry. From a conceptual perspective, Mufti (2016) warns against understanding multilingualism—his focus is on vernacular speech in anglophone Indian literature—as a resistant configuration, evading the logic of the market. Revealing the colonial roots of world literature, Mufti sees the occasional recourse to the vernacular as a response to the pressures to assimilate local literary systems into an Anglo-centric literary sphere. From this perspective, vernacular speech and multilingualism are paradoxical gestures, uneasily oscillating between a “claim to *authentic* national expression against the alien presence of English” (172) and an “‘ethnicized’ assimilation [to a global cultural system] that gets recoded and reproduced as linguistic diversity” (171). More sociologically and empirically oriented approaches, as pursued, for instance, by Brian Lennon (2010) and David Gramling (2016), have examined some of the specificities of publishing multilingual literatures, noting the privileging of soft or weak forms of multilingualism that ultimately conform to the market’s demands for monolingual literature. Gramling, referencing literary scholar Yaseen Noorani, holds that “soft” multilingualism sanctions specific forms of multilingual creativity and “translatedness” (2016: 24), namely those that still ensure translatability across linguistic and cultural borders.

While it is difficult to determine whether Owuor’s *The Dragonfly Sea* and Lickorish Quinn’s *The Dust Never Settles* fall into the category of soft or hard multilingualism, it is clear that they are not easily translatable. In both texts the use of multilingualism does not, at least not in a simple manner, uphold and cement the monolingual paradigm. Though both employ specific translational strategies to bridge the gaps between languages and secure a degree

of readability (even for monolingual English readers), they undermine what Gramling (2016: 2) calls “monolingualization,” that is, processes that seek to keep languages separate and untainted by the influence of others. *The Dragonfly Sea* is certainly more radical in its use of multilingual strategies than *The Dust Never Settles*. Evoking a wide spectrum of different languages and enacting frequent shifts as well as mixings between them, Owuor’s novel is only partly comprehensible to most readers. In contrast, Lickorish Quinn’s triangulation of English, Spanish, and Quechua leaves boundaries between languages mostly intact, which is to say that they remain discernible. Though cherishing translingual exchange, *The Dust Never Settles* is also committed to flaunting the particularity of languages in general and the specificity of Quechua in particular.

The mediating factor of production becomes salient when considering that *The Dust Never Settles* was published by an independent publisher, namely Oneworld, while *The Dragonfly Sea* appeared with Alfred A. Knopf. Knopf is part of Penguin Random House (which is in turn owned by the German conglomerate Bertelsmann) and thus belongs to the so-called Big Five (also including Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster), that is, commercialized trade publishing with high consecrating power and aimed at large-scale publication. Typically, independent publishing houses are credited with allowing for a higher degree of experimentality and for prioritizing literary value over economic value (see Sapiro, 2015). In critical discourse, literary value is frequently tied to untranslatability, the “roadblocks” that, according to Emily Apter (2006: 9), prevent frictionless circulation in a global market. Peter Vermeulen and Amélie Hurkens (2020: 434) aptly note that scholars and critics tend to “map [...] the distinction between mass-market and small-scale publishing onto that between processes of devernacularization on the one hand and a commitment to vernacular specificity on the other”; along similar lines, Lennon (2010: 9) holds that “strong plurilingualism [...] is today found exclusively in books published by ‘independent’ publishing.”

However, considering the novels’ multilingual poetics, there seems to be little difference in their degree of experimentality or multilingualism; if anything, *The Dragonfly Sea* makes use of a ‘harder’ multilingualism that unsettles linguistic boundaries more profoundly than *The Dust Never Settles*. Differences, however, are more pronounced when we look beyond the poetics of the text to the book as a material product, including what Lennon calls the “oft-discounted epiphenomena of book reading” (2010: 4), namely titles, dedications, and epigraphs, but also marketing texts. Strikingly, *The Dust Never Settles* contains a glossary, which translates Spanish, Quechua, and Japanese words into English, while also providing some explanations

of culture-specific concepts. This strategy, probably an editorial decision aiming at translatability, is strangely at odds with the novel's poetics, which illustrates that moving between languages is an experiential reality.⁹ Glossaries are frequently considered to be domesticating devices that minimize the structural and conceptual incompatibilities between languages and buttress the dominance of one language, namely that of the target language.¹⁰ Even if one is inclined to see the effects of the glossary more ambivalently,¹¹ its integration clearly indicates that literary texts, as commodities in the market, always bear the traces of multiple agents (i.e., of authors, publishers, editors, and anticipated readers), including their possibly opposing interests. This conflict of interests also materializes in the title's history. According to *The Bookseller*, Oneworld originally purchased the rights of the novel under its name *Mancharisqa*,¹² a title that the publishing house apparently considered inimical to the book's marketability as they decided to change it to *The Dust Never Settles*. Whatever else this admittedly brief comparison of *The Dragonfly Sea* with *The Dust Never Settles* shows, it is clear that possibilities of experimenting with multilingual configurations in the anglophone sphere cannot be captured by the traditional dualism between independent, small-scale publishing and commercialized, large-scale publishing. Oneworld appears to deem it necessary to contain the poetic multi- and translanguaging of *The Dust Never Settles*, most likely because it is a debut novel written by an author who still needs to assemble sufficient symbolic capital to succeed in what James English calls "the economy of prestige" (2008).¹³ Conversely, literary multilingualism, untranslatability, and translanguaging are no longer seen as incompatible with the law of the market and the generation of economic value.

It is in line with market logic that both publishing houses employ highly conventional strategies to promote and sell the books. Both Oneworld Publications and Knopf, on their respective websites, activate the heavily clichéd tourism trope, connected with privileged forms of traveling, to announce *The Dust Never Settles* and *The Dragonfly Sea*, respectively, and to target Western

9 Lickorish Quinn notes that the glossary, though catering to the needs of monolingual anglophone readers, is also "ambassadorial work," a "stretched-out hand," and a friendly "invitation" to explore her Peruvian heritage (personal conversation, April 28, 2022).

10 See, for example, Torres, who notes that "a glossary [...] provides further assurances that the monolingual reader does not have to languish in unfamiliar territory" (2007: 82).

11 See Fagan, who holds that the glossary provides "interpretive possibilities" (2016: 59).

12 See <https://www.thebookseller.com/rights/rights/oneworld-gets-peruvian-debut-1213820>.

13 Vermeulen and Hurkens (2020) provide an intriguing examination of the relation between vernacularization and American independent publishing.

audiences in the anglo-sphere. Both evoke the novels' strange yet beautiful local settings and connect the texts with the pleasures of faraway travels. Knopf even goes so far as to applaud *The Dragonfly Sea* for providing a form of comfort reading, an "armchair adventure," that connects the excitement of imaginary traveling with the cozy place at home (see *Penguin*, n.d.: n.p.).¹⁴ Promising "maximum enjoyment with a minimum of effort" (Huggan 2001: 179), the logic of tourism exoticizes the novel, and by implication its multi- and translingualism, showing that books, notwithstanding their possibly critical, decolonial, and transgressive thrust, never exist outside of the neoliberal forces of what Graham Huggan (2001: 12) has called the "cosmopolitan alterity industry."

Literary multilingualism in the anglophone publishing field, this article has shown, is a conflictual, complex, and multilayered configuration. It coalesces, in a sometimes-paradoxical manner, into multilingual realities, creative liberties of fiction, the aesthetic and affective experience of readers, as well as the demands of the book market. Literary multilingualism is as much a creative, transgressive, and sometimes anti-hegemonic practice of languaging as it is steeped in the global publishing industry and the neoliberal economization of the literary sphere. Prioritizing one dimension at the expense of another inevitably leads to a simplified understanding of the shifting valences and complexities of the post-monolingual.

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14 See <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/545470/the-dragonfly-sea-by-yvonne-adhiambo-owuor/>. Accessed May 2, 2022. Unsurprisingly, Jahazi Press, the Kenyan publisher of *The Dragonfly Sea*, does not allude to the tourism trope.

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Shifting Comprehension in Novels by Abdulrazak Gurnah and Zoë Wicomb: Lingualism in Action

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Abstract

In an attempt to conceptualise literary multilingualism—or just “lingualism,” to use Robert Stockhammer’s term—without reifying language boundaries, this article reads literary fiction as a negotiation of different *regimes of comprehensibility*. These negotiations occur (1) on the level of the story-world, (2) materially, in the mediation of the narrative as book artefact and (3) between these two levels. Lingualism, then, is not just context-sensitive but *context-constituted*. The apparently anarchic freedom of literary language is held in check by regimes of comprehensibility that ensure that even nonsense will carry meaning. The article’s analysis of works by Abdulrazak Gurnah and Zoë Wicomb shows how they engage potentially transformative moments of (in) comprehensibility in what Pratt named the colonial “contact zone.”

Keywords

lingualism – regimes of comprehensibility – contact zone – Abdulrazak Gurnah – Zoë Wicomb

Would the phrase “Hataki mavi yenu ndani ya boma lake” be accepted in an English-language novel? It seems so: it occurs on page 54 of the Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novel *Afterlives* (2020). Appearing as it does among the neatly balanced cadences of Gurnah’s English sentences, inviting identification as a Swahili phrase, it draws our attention to the *lingualism* of this novel, a qualitative feature

that Robert Stockhammer glosses as a text's "relationship to specific idioms" (2017: 33). At the same time, if we think of literature in institutional terms, such play with lingualism makes us aware of what a particular niche of prestigious fiction publishing will tolerate in terms of linguistic diversity. That level of tolerance is fairly high, and has probably become higher in recent years if one considers the gradually increasing frequency of languages other than English in Gurnah's oeuvre. But what do such instances of lingualism achieve beyond manifesting sheer difference? What kind of a response do they elicit from their readers? Above all, how do we approach them methodologically and theoretically as a *literary* phenomenon?

Informed by such questions, the purpose of this article is to explore how lingualism in this sense entails writerly and editorial negotiations in literary fiction with different *regimes of comprehensibility*, negotiations that occur (1) on the level of the story-world, (2) materially, in the mediation of the narrative as book artefact and (3) between these two levels. Hence, lingualism is not just context-sensitive but *context-constituted*. This point is important: if lingualism indicates a relationship to specific idioms, it must be added that the very recognition of 'idioms'—and the ability to appreciate such linguistic difference within a contained reading experience—is not an inert fact but is dependent on the relative positioning of writer, text and reader. Literary language could, in principle, seem entirely anarchic (think of Dada), yet is held in check by regimes of comprehensibility that ensure that even nonsense will carry meaning. In my selected examples from the Zanzibari English writer Gurnah and the South African Scottish writer Zoë Wicomb, the stakes of such regimentation are raised yet further, given how they engage fractious but also potentially transformative moments of (in)comprehensibility in the colonial "contact zone" (Pratt, 1991). The transformative potential relates not least to the temporal irony that these texts fictionalise, from their significantly different contemporary vantage point, the history of colonialism in eastern and southern Africa. Despite this, these novels can also be claimed to some extent to remain beholden to the imperial-vernacular hierarchy of languages inherited from the colonial order.

An underlying premise of my argument is that lingualism in literature needs to be considered as 'staged,' involving different determining instances, rather than an organic outflow of linguistic diversity. As Wicomb comments in a discussion of her multilingual practice in the novel *October* (2014), she is not committed to linguistic verisimilitude, as "otherwise the entire novel would be a mixture of languages" (Wicomb and Attridge, 2017: 212). We should, however, not mistakenly assume that such staging is exclusively controlled by the author. Indeed, prose literature in alphabetic script will be especially constrained by the modality of print and the conventions of writing. Gurnah, with his publisher's consent, places Swahili phrases very deliberately in a novel that other-

wise adheres to a mainstream anglophone, not to say British, regime of comprehensibility. What is more, the Swahili phrases are rendered in standardised, Latin orthography and provide the graphic impression of a language that is equivalent in function to what is presented here as English—a form of serial monolingualism, if you wish, rather than fluid translanguaging.

While such markers of linguistic difference run the risk of having little more than an ornamental effect on most readers, they are also invitations to interpretation. By this I mean that if an external description of how linguistic difference is displayed on the printed page is quite easily achieved, a hermeneutic investment in reading the singular literary text is required to make sense of that difference. It is in this spirit that the argument in this article will take shape by engaging a few of the lingual implications of Gurnah's *Desertion* (2005) and *Afterlives* and Wicomb's *Still Life* (2020), all of them quite recent novels. I will then attempt to distil some theoretical points from that exercise, in view of the negotiability of regimes of comprehensibility. I should add, moreover, that this is the second instalment of two articles, the first of which was published in *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Studies* (Helgesson, 2022). The first article is conceptually oriented and discusses how the regime approach compares with some other current approaches to literary multilingualism. Specifically, it looks at authorial, textual and reader-oriented approaches to multilingualism developed by Steven G. Kellman (2000), Stockhammer (2017), Doris Sommer (2004), and Julia Tidigs and Markus Huss (2017). Ultimately, my claim is that the regimes approach has the potential to accommodate all three angles. The present article is intent on applying this approach and thereby also testing its viability.

First, however, let me offer a precautionary note on the gesture of presenting a new term such as *regimes of comprehensibility*. It is not obvious to me that the scholarly field of multilingualism and translanguaging really needs *more* concepts—on the contrary, there is a somewhat bewildering proliferation of terms that often overlap or duplicate each other. An illustrative case in point would be the subtitle to Robin Sabino's *Languaging without Languages: Beyond Metro-, Multi-, Poly-, Pluri- and Translanguaging* (2018). Casting the net wider, we could mention adjectives, such as “heterolingual,” “exophone,” “allophone,” or even “postlingual,” that have been doing the rounds in literary research (Meylaerts, 2006; Wright, 2008; Porra, 2011; elhariry and Walkowitz, 2021). There is something about language as a knowledge-focus that inspires the creation of constantly new terms. These have local relevance in specific arguments but also run the risk of sowing confusion or, above all, of reinventing the wheel, as Alastair Pennycook (2016) judiciously discusses in an overview of current sociolinguistic terminology.

Aware, then, of the perils of neologism, it is my intention through the coinage of “regimes of comprehensibility” (its first occurrence is in Bodin et al.,

2020) to come to grips with an aporia in the discourse on multilingualism and translanguaging—illustrated precisely by my choice to speak of multilingualism *and* translanguaging. On the one hand, the highly motivated ongoing push towards a “postmonolingual” (Yildiz, 2012) conception of language has been accompanied by the observation that simply privileging “multilingualism” does nothing to unsettle the habit of thinking about languages as nameable, objectified entities (Gramling, 2021). That is to say, while a widely cited study such as Yildiz’s, makes it clear that the monolingual paradigm is “a key structuring principle that organises the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectives such as cultures and nations” (2012: 2), and that we therefore need to demystify monolingualism to grasp it as a historical construction, such critique does not of itself provide an alternative to the naming of languages as separate entities. This is also evident in Stockhammer’s understanding of linguistics as signalling a relation to “specific idioms” (2017: 33), phrasing that is premised on the identifiability of such idioms.

On the other hand, when philosophical critiques of linguistic bordering (Sakai, 2009; Young, 2016) attempt to provide precisely such an alternative to naming by demonstrating the absurdity of treating languages as countable things, they risk ignoring at the same time the lived experience of linguistic difference and non-comprehension, the self-reinforcing material and institutional authority that standardised languages carry, and also the affective and cognitive density that accumulates when inhabiting one particular language—or mode of languaging—over an extended period of time. The weight of language cannot be dismissed that easily with a philosophical sleight of hand, which is precisely why one needs to consider how the conjunction (and disjunction) of writerly, textual/material and readerly forms of linguistic inertia impinge on literature.

Theories of literary multilingualism need to account for empirical constraints to the theoretical deconstruction of linguistic boundaries. We might illustrate this with a thought experiment: if we imagine the planetary sum of utterances (spoken and written and signed) at any given moment, the crushing majority of these will always be linguistically closed to any specific languaged subjectivity. Or, less extravagantly, if we return to the quoted phrase from Gurnah’s novel, it is clearly marked as ‘not-English’ and asks to be read (but will mostly fail to be read) as meaningful in its own right. The empirical dividing line here will be between readers who understand Swahili and those who don’t. As Gayatri Spivak once put it, “[n]o speech is speech if it is not heard” (2000: 22)—nor is writing actualised unless it is read. That dividing line is per-

haps the most concrete manifestation we will get of linguistic boundaries. It is always, in principle, a negotiable separation—there is no human language (or mode of languaging) that cannot be learned, yet the investment in time, the overcoming of material obstacles and the cognitive inertia that language acquisition entails always serve as an effective buffer zone between regimes of comprehensibility.

But beyond the empirical constraint manifested in non-comprehension, there is also a normative problem with the unconditional deconstruction of linguistic boundaries: it risks demeaning the painstaking labour that both writers and readers invest in mastering their instrument. Literature, after all, has everything to do with harnessing the potential of language, and one crucial way to do so is by cultivating attachments to its inherited forms. In extreme cases, such as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, for instance, these attachments are endlessly plural and protean. More commonly, however, literary traditions (both written and oral) have the tendency not just to use but cumulatively to *constitute* language. This is essentially what Alexander Beecroft's half-joking one-liner "a language is a dialect with a literature" (2015: 6) indicates. Beecroft's understanding builds on the philologist Sheldon Pollock's notion of "literization" and "literarization" as observable processes through history whereby certain varieties of language (and not others) accumulate authority and aesthetic prestige (2006: 5). A consequence of such a view is that the tug-of-war between dissolving and constructing linguistic boundaries carries weight in the literary domain. Literature, historically, has a stake in the bordering of languages that by far predates the modern nation-state, a view that finds additional support—to quote again from the same essay—in Spivak's well-known statement that "a verbal text is jealous of its linguistic signature but impatient of national identity" (2000: 21).

For all these reasons, I would argue that there is also a legitimate aspect to the writerly, readerly and editorial investment in institutionalised languages. Without them, very little could practically be done in the domain of literature. However, as I also discuss in the companion piece to this article, the notion of regimes of comprehensibility becomes a way both to acknowledge the gravitational pull of specific languages and to conceptualise the adaptability of linguistic constellations among writers and readers. A focus on regimes may enable a more differentiated take on literary multilingualism than the binary choice between boundedness and unboundedness. Derived from a few statements by Michel Foucault, the notion of "regimes" has tended to highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between truth and power (Lorenzini, 2015). Although I am not making strong Foucauldian claims on my own behalf, the heuristic of regimes of comprehensibility is intended to alert us to the condi-

tional nature of lingualism, or what I and a colleague elsewhere called “translingual events” (Helgesson and Kullberg, 2018). To say that translingual events are conditioned by regimes is therefore to say two things: first, that only some varieties of multilingualism, but not others, will in a given context be made publicly and textually visible; second, that regimes themselves are not only multiple but amenable to adaptation and change. A distinction between hard and soft regimes might add to such a nuanced view—and may dovetail with an attention both to textually immanent qualities (where regimes might soften) and to the institutional and material circumstances of publication (where regimes will tend to be hard).

To demonstrate these points, Gurnah’s 2005 novel *Desertion* is a good place to start. We are confronted here with the narration of multilingual lifeworlds and failing comprehension, but with very few graphically marked instances of linguistic difference, or what Stockhammer calls “glottamimetic” representation (2017: 41). The opening chapters of *Desertion*, set in early twentieth-century East Africa, are striking for the way they focalise the narrative across the colonial divide. At first we enter the world of the modest trader Hassanali and his family, only to be confronted with the sudden, enigmatic arrival of a wounded European man. The second chapter then immerses us in the lifeworld of the colonial administrator Frederick Turner. On the one hand, the fiction thereby manifests the Manichean order of colonialism, but on the other, it bridges—unevenly—the two sides of this order. If Hassanali can be assumed to live in a Swahili-speaking but also arabophone environment, Gurnah nonetheless presents this fiction to his readers in English. To achieve a full-blown glottamimesis (that is, a representation of another language), the Hassanali chapters could in theory have been written in Swahili and the Turner chapters in English, but the threshold for comprehension would then have been insurmountable for the vast majority of the prospective readers (and buyers of the book, to be blunt). In this hypothetical case, there would have been a much smaller number of readers who could both have navigated such a regime of comprehensibility and afforded the book. Gurnah and his publisher’s overdetermined decision to make this an (almost) consistently anglophone book is therefore a manifestation of the objective unevenness of the world republic of letters and a perpetuation of the hierarchy between ‘cosmopolitan’ English and ‘vernacular’ Swahili that began with colonialism.

Insofar as the transnational regime of English is the condition of possibility for Gurnah’s literary project, what we get instead of a full glottamimesis is, as mentioned, a story-world that *stages* largely separate regimes of comprehensibility. In the first chapter, Hassanali’s meaning-making environment is presented as self-sufficient and (still) unobstructed by conflicting regimes.

The wounded Englishman/*mzungu*—who someone at one point suspects is a *rukhi*, a demon (2005: 20)—is so weakened when he appears in this chapter that he utters nothing but groans. In the second chapter, focalised through Turner, harshly colonial aspects of incomprehension and linguistic difference are, however, foregrounded. The children's cries of "mzungu" (white man) are italicised here—unlike in the Hassanali chapter—and Turner's arrogant reaction at the semiotic opacity of the village is highlighted:

Children waved dementedly to him and tried to cross his path, calling *mzungu mzungu*, as if otherwise he would have missed seeing them. He heard other things but could not catch anything clearly. He did his best not to. Let them shout their filthy words, why not, for all the good it would do them. Their voices irritated him, like the buzz of insects or the bleating of animals, like the whines of decrepit street-women in a London dockyard alleyway.

GURNAH, 2005: 36

It is a disturbing passage that accounts above all for a negative affect in Turner's disavowal of linguistic difference. The noise of language he does not understand yet is uttered by people he supposedly rules over and is transposed to the aural domain of animality (buzzing insects, bleating animals), and a violently gendered and classist flash of memory from England (the street-women). This staging of clashing regimes of comprehensibility, however, also avoids glottamimesis of the 'other side' (save for the word "mzungu"), even as Gurnah in this chapter provides us with a full stylistic pastiche of imperial English circa 1900: "the ride to the estate went over some rough ground and kept him in trim. It gave his stallion Majnoon a bit of work to do as well, the fractious devil" (2005: 31); "*A wrinkled old man of monkey cunning*, Frederick tried the phrase to himself two or three times" (2005: 35). It is, then, unavoidably within the adaptable cosmopolitan regime of English that multilingualism is accommodated, and through English that the affective dimensions of the imperial-vernacular divide are narrated. This is obviously the case with the other two novels I discuss here as well, which points to the governing constraint of literary publishing: albeit flexible and somewhat genre-dependent, there is a boundary of comprehensibility beyond which a book cannot go within a given context of publication. Conventionally speaking, it is this boundary that prompts translation—and the subsequent rearticulation of the narrative in another regime of comprehensibility.

This may seem like a roundabout way of stating the obvious, but the intention is to disarm certain popular assumptions about literary multilingualism. One such assumption that I and a colleague recently problematised is that

the presence of different languages on the printed page somehow automatically unsettles governing linguistic norms. Having discussed novels by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Arundhati Roy and Xiaolu Guo, this is how we chose to describe the double-bind of working translingually in English:

On the one hand, [these novels'] readability across continents is itself a sign of the global prominence of "one" language, English. Their circulation is conditional on the global structure of literary publishing, dominated as it is by six or seven corporations, but with internally differentiated markets and a variety of target readerships. On the other hand, at a textual level, they offer clear challenges to the machine of global English and, by extension, to the procedures of literary pedagogy and scholarship.

HELGESSON and NEUMANN, 2021: 228

The flipside to the assumption of linguistically coded resistance is, then, that it occurs within very tight and robust limits that are not just linguistic but corporate as well. The example of *Desertion* speaks therefore mostly to the capacity of narrative discourse to evoke from within *one* conventional regime of anglophone alphabetic comprehensibility the experience of moving in and across several. The more important question, given those limits, is therefore what the narrative motivation for staging multilingualism might be—and what the effect of that staging may be.

This is dramatised powerfully in Gurnah's later novel *Afterlives*, where limits of language are pushed a bit further than in *Desertion*. Not only are there numerous instances, such as the one I cited at the beginning of this article, that present the reader directly with Swahili phrases, but the novel also adds German to the mix. Historically, Swahili has a colonial history of its own, as it was actively promoted by the Germans as a lingua franca during their few decades in Tanganyika (Mwangi, 2021: 80). An intimation of the colonial dimension of the language is provided, for example, in the narrative context of my introductory quotation: "Hataki mavi yenu ndani ya boma lake" (Gurnah, 2020: 54). This is uttered by a guard at the military camp, specifically so that the African soldiers will *comprehend* the order imposed by the Germans. It is glossed in terms that metonymically rehearse the colonial projection of European 'cleanliness' and native 'filth': "This is the mzungu's camp. Everything is clean here. He doesn't want your shit inside his boma" (2020: 54).

A far more complicated instance of multilingualism in *Afterlives* foregrounds multiple and clashing valences of the languages in terms of both an imperial-vernacular and a gender-determined divide. This is when Hamza, who endured the First World War as a soldier in the Tanganyikan *Schutztruppe*

(and acquired German along the way), expresses his forbidden love for Afiya, whom he erroneously suspects is the wife of his benefactor and the owner of the house where he lives. A longer quotation is in order here to show the complex negotiations of meaning, value and affect that occur in this scene:

The only German poems he knew were in the book that the officer had given him, *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*. He took the first four lines of Schiller's "*Das Geheimnis*," and translated them for her:

Sie konnte mir kein Wörtchen sagen,
Zu viele Lauscher waren wach,
Den Blick nur durft ich schüchtern fragen,
Und wohl verstand ich, was er sprach.

He wrote them out on the piece of paper he had stolen from Nassor Biashara's office, trimmed it so that it was only just big enough for the verse, then folded it so it was no wider than two fingers.

[...]

[T]he following morning as he met Afiya at the door, he slipped the square of paper into her palm. On it he had written:

Alijaribu kulisema neno moja, lakini
hakuweza –
Kuna wasikilizi wengi karibu,
Lakini jicho langu la hofu limeona bila
tafauti
Lugha ghani jicho lake linasema.

She was already waiting at the door when he hurried back from the café [...] "I can read what your eye is saying too," she said, referring to the last two lines of the translation: My eye can see for certain / the language her eye is speaking. Then she kissed the tips of her fingers and touched his left cheek.

GURNAH, 2020: 192

Strongly motivated by the internal logic of the narrative, this is a remarkably subtle staging of multilingualism. The Schiller poem, as mentioned, comes from a book that had been given to Hamza by a dubious German officer who kept him as a personal servant but also indulged him in his aspiration to learn German. The symbolic resonance is clear enough: the canon of the colonial

occupier is being imposed upon the colonial subject. But the colonial subject, in turn, turns this imperial canon to his own vernacular use—not to resist the coloniser, but to overcome a domestic, culturally determined obstacle separating him from Afiya. In the tightly regulated Muslim world of the Tanganyika coast evoked by Gurnah here and in so many of his fictions, men and women inhabit separate spheres. The unmarried youth, above all, should have no contact with one another across the gender chasm.

The poem is what affords Hamza an occasion to circumvent the taboo. Through a strategy that compares with how Assia Djébar, as a young Algerian, wrote forbidden love letters in French rather than Arabic (Djébar, 2007), Schiller's German displaces Hamza's anxiety when communicating with Afiya. More than that, the poem itself speaks to the situation we are reading about. Called "The Secret" (*Das Geheimnis*), the poem is presented here to the reader in three different versions, yet, considered from within the novel's dominant regime of comprehension, remains hidden in plain sight. The Swahili translation, after all, is only partially accommodated by the anglophone narrative discourse: "My eye can see for certain." The first two lines, which mention how "she" could not utter any words, as there were too many eavesdroppers afoot—"Zu viele Lauscher" and "Kuna wasikilizi wengi"—are withheld in English. Instead, it is when Afiya kisses her fingers and touches Hamza's cheek that the meaning of the first two lines is dramatised—through a mode of gestural translation, one might say. This is a striking meta-comment on the pluralised readerly situation into which the novel is cast. The implicit question here could be glossed as follows: who is and who is not an eavesdropper vis-à-vis the text of the novel? Or to rehearse the terms of this article: how do we make sense of the lingualism in this passage and its activation of multiple regimes of comprehensibility within the overarching regime of English? If anything, Gurnah's curation of linguistic difference points towards a differentiated—but not *too* differentiated—readership. Difference, one might say, is being carefully managed.

My third example, culled from Wicomb's novel *Still Life*, provides yet another, even more intricate inroad to such questions. The novel could be described as a thoroughly intertextual historical fantasy revolving around the person and work of Thomas Pringle (1789–1834), a Scottish poet and abolitionist whose years in the Cape Colony have made him remembered as "founding a tradition of English South African poetry" (Attwell, 2017: 136). In Wicomb's fiction, however, Pringle is a largely absent centre, ceding place both to actual people he worked with—such as Mary Prince, whose slave narrative he edited—and to fictional or textual figures who are reanimated in the novel. One such figure, textual but not entirely fictional, is Hinza Marossi, drawn from one of Pringle's most famous poems, "The Bechuana Boy," but in actual life also Pringle's foster

son. Historically, the context here is the early British colonisation in the Eastern Cape, in the 1820s. This was frontier country. Throughout the nineteenth century, African communities (notably Xhosa) resisted the colonial imposition in a long sequence of wars. In Pringle's time it was a notably diverse and multilingual setting, marked by the comings and goings of African labourers, Boer farmers and British settlers. Hinza's coming-to-being as a Tswana boy in the novel is therefore, suitably, a multiform instance of lingualism—partially glottamimetic, but above all productively undecidable in ways that lead beyond Stockhammer's "specific idioms". Indeed, we see here a strong example of how a writer may bend regimes of comprehensibility to their own purposes. This is how the passage begins:

Ke ... ke ... I am

I wanted to swallow, but all was parched, and my tongue like a flap of leather moved with difficulty.

Ke nosi mo ... le fat sheng, I tried to say.

Ik ben ... Ik ben ... hier ...

... in de wêreld

here ... in the world.

[...] Finally the words fired out with a ra-ta-ta-tat: *Ik ben-al-leen-ig-in-de-wê-reld.*

WICOMB, 2020: 81

To readers of Pringle the poet, the situation is familiar yet unlike what we encounter in the poem, whose vocabulary and diction are resolutely English: "Then, meekly gazing in my face, / Said in the language of his race, / With smiling look yet pensive tone, / Stranger—I'm in the world alone!" (Pringle, 1834) It is only in a footnote to the poem that Pringle claims that Hinza—called Marossi in this instance—uttered the phrase in Afrikaans, or what was still called Dutch at the time: "Ik ben alleenig in de waereld!"

It is a moment, then, of confusion, of a disruption of multiple regimes of comprehensibility. But contrary to the colonial arrogance of Gurnah's Frederick Turner, who simply rejected the possibility of undoing or adapting his own regime, the scene in Wicomb's novel, especially when read together with Pringle's poem, is far more fluid. To say, as Pringle does, that the boy spoke "in the language of his race" is, to begin with, puzzling. "Ik ben alleenig in de waereld!" does not seem to merit such a description, whereas "Ke nosi mo ... le fat sheng," in the scene in the novel, does. Always tongue-in-cheek, this is how Wicomb, in

Hinza's voice, draws our attention to this anomaly: "I have to agree with Mary that it is strange how these [words] came to be uttered in my new tongue, the Boer language of Baas Karel, but as the poem says, they truly were" (2020, 81–82). It is more plausible, however, that the first words in the cited passage from the novel, indicating 'Setswana' more than anything else, would have been uttered by a "Bechuana boy". The equivocation of lingualism in this scene in the novel is taken yet further in the following paragraphs (also in the voice of Hinza):

The man's faltering speech came as a surprise. Clearly the guttural tongue of Baas Karel, from whom I had escaped, was not native to him. Ja, the strange man said in the harsh language we shared so imperfectly, the Boer language new to both of us, Ja-nee dat zien ik. Zo. Maar, ik vraagt, wat is jou naam?

What is your name?

Hinza, I replied, soothed into using my native tongue. Leina la me ke Hinza, I said, before I remembered that he was a white man. So I translated: Myn naam heeft Hinza. His voice bounced back in my own tongue as he repeated in Setwsana: Leina la me ke ... Hinza, and then having chewed and savoured the sounds, he said smiling, tapping his chest: Leina la me ke ... Thomas. Mister, Mijnheer Pringle. I looked again into his eyes, the strange blue-green irises, and found that my words had stirred up something akin to kindness.

WICOMB, 2020: 83–84

It is, again, a scene that contrasts strikingly with Gurnah. If the translated poem in *Afterlives* is enlisted in a game of hide-and-seek that simultaneously displaces and enables communication between two lovers who share the same language but are separated by gender, the give-and-take among languages here—which also builds on a poem—is both more direct and more stumbling. In other words, if the regimes of comprehensibility we find in *Afterlives* remain fairly hard and bounded according to convention, with each language in its place and assigned to distinct speakers, the scene in *Still Life* stages a more far-reaching undoing of such boundaries. Pringle is generously depicted here as being open to other modes of languaging, as much as Hinza, for the sake of survival, must adapt to whatever language *works*. The "Boer language" is "new to both," and Setswana is alien to Pringle. Even so, having "chewed and savoured the sounds"—note the emphasis on language as sensuous material—Pringle attempts to mirror Hinza's utterance by pronouncing the same words.

As a character in the novel, Hinza is quite literally born from a text. In the fiction, he also reflects on this peculiar mode of being. The line “I am alone in the world” (Wicomb, 2020: 82) is here understood to be both his coming-to-language and his coming-to-being:

It would seem that they were mine, the first words spoken by me in so very many days and nights of the full moon shrinking to a sickle and plumping up once more, and I having thought that I'd never speak again, that the veld, the plants and animals would not require the useless sounds of words. I had tried first to hum, but to no avail. Then that miracle of words, like a fountain spraying over smooth white pebbles around which to wrap the tongue, though they were mine for the short seconds only that it took to utter. [...] So, having entered the world creakily, having tumbled out all helter-skelter, they somersaulted into another voice, to be shaped once again by him, by the poet's reporting tongue.

WICOMB, 2020: 82

Language is here not in anyone's clear ownership, but should rather be understood as a relationship whose reciprocity is at constant risk—in the colonial predicament of which Wicomb writes—of being denied and distorted. A further implication of this scene is also that the shift between modes, from speech to writing and print, contributes to that distortion. At the same time, in a narratorial *mise en abyme*, we are of course reading Hinza who is both presenting and analysing, for our benefit, the encounter with Pringle in Wicomb's deftly ironic English diction. Print, then, is not statically reduced here to one single (colonial) power relation, but can accommodate, across time, multiple and changing power relations. The ‘actual’ Hinza, lost in the abyss of time, is here vindicated by Wicomb, our own contemporary. This is, in effect, the same type of narrative irony undergirding Gurnah's staging of lingualism: he is now master of the regime of comprehensibility that once the colonial power imposed on East Africa. And it should be equally clear that it no longer is the same regime as in 1900. Temporality needs therefore to be factored into the account of literary lingualism, as I discuss below.

By way of closing, it is now worth returning to the sceptical question whether the notion of regimes of comprehensibility has added anything to the argument. I believe there is a case to be made for its explanatory value, particularly in two respects. This first is, as we have seen, that the novels in question all present us with scenes of comprehension and non-comprehension in what can be described as multilingual/translingual environments. There is Frederick Turner's abject experience of non-comprehension, Hamza's sly displacement

of comprehension across languages to reach out to his beloved, and Hinza and Pringle's mutually well-meaning navigation, in the asymmetrical colonial contact zone, through non-comprehension to arrive at a novel mode of comprehension that is not fully identifiable as any single language. These are qualities that neither the general term 'language' nor the more elaborate 'translingualism' or 'translanguaging' quite capture. Similarly, this may indeed be lingualism in Stockhammer's sense, but that term also falls short of indicating the shifting boundaries of comprehensibility. As the Hinza chapter in Wicomb's novel shows, comprehension comes in degrees and may evolve. Language is here perspectival and protean, never a static fact.

Secondly, and this emphasises rather the regimented aspect, regimes of comprehensibility allow for both a text-focused as well as an institutional and material analysis of the literary text. My point here, in other words, is to emphasise the need to include both dimensions—intra- and extratextual—in the analysis of literary multilingualism. If the narratives of *Desertion* and *Still Life* (less so *Afterlives*) confront us with colonial situations where 'English' is being imposed as a dominant, imperial regime, as material objects these books are issued in a contemporary moment where English is globally dominant yet also more multifarious than ever. Whatever occurs on the printed page needs therefore to be read not just in terms of what happens in the story-world, but in terms of what contemporary literary publishing in English will and won't allow. Wicomb has directly commented on this herself. In an interview, she explains that whenever glossaries have occurred in editions of her work to explain Afrikaans terms, this has been at the insistence of her publishers. A glossary, in her view, "panders to the predominance of English" (Wicomb and Attridge, 2017: 213). Her own ambition is to retain as much control as possible by opting for small publishers and, notably, by not having an agent: "the level of interference with the text that so many agents nowadays insist on, is intolerable. [...] I decline" (Wicomb and Attridge, 2017: 218). And yet, as Gurnah's recent novels show—issued by the much bigger publisher Bloomsbury—an argument could be made for seeing literary publishing as a regime in its own right that tolerates a much higher degree of non-comprehensibility within English than, say, in journalism or non-fiction. A more suspicious interpretation of this tolerance would, however, decry the tendency for literary English to grow ever more dominant precisely by endlessly absorbing vernacular elements from a wide range of lingual environments, an equivocation addressed by Christina Kullberg and David Watson in their recent volume on literary vernaculars (2022: 1–24).

From such a perspective, even Wicomb's strongly worded defence of her authorial independence can do little to resist the regime of English writ large. However, on the micro-level—which is where literature matters most, per-

haps—both Wicomb and Gurnah demonstrate how comprehensibility can be mobilised, challenged and to some extent reconfigured through acts of narration. Regimentation of the comprehensible notwithstanding, they enable in this way a differentiated (albeit limited) set of potential reading experiences. Put differently, their novels are not designed to be mastered by any single, ideal-typical reader of English, but instead engage partial and variable comprehension as an aesthetic resource. The more upbeat conclusion, then, is that regimes of comprehensibility are what enable their transformative aesthetics in the first place. From that originary constraint their miracle of words issues forth.

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Book Reviews



Andreas Leben and Alenka Koron (eds.), *Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit im österreichischen und slowenischen Kontext*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2019. ISBN 9783772086762. 317pp. € 78.

The volume *Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit im österreichischen und slowenischen Kontext* (2019), edited by Andreas Leben and Alenka Koron, addresses literary multilingualism in and around Austria and Slovenia, two neighbouring countries where tight language contact is a phenomenon of the past while remaining an active and vibrant cultural element of the present. Austria and Slovenia have a notable history of entanglement, a feature shared with many regions in Eastern Europe. At the time of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Austria was the dominant party and Slovenia the subordinate. In the case of Slovenia, this unequal relationship helped language and literature gain significance and become markers of local identity. In the case of Austria, literature was used as one of the platforms for creating an Austrian nation-state different from the German nation (12). This entanglement provides an interesting platform for the study of literary multilingualism.

The first three chapters of the volume define some key terms in the field of literary multilingualism. The first chapter, by Marko Juvan, brings historical questions of hegemony into the present and discusses the dynamics between monolingualism and multilingualism in contemporary literary systems. Juvan sees literature as being regulated by the same forces that come into play in the global economy: “multinational companies” can engage in “unrestrained exploitation of the peripheral workforce” (29). He is sceptical towards scholars who naively celebrate a supposedly increasing multilingualism in literature today while neglecting the historical origins of this phenomenon.

This sharp opening chapter is followed by a similarly challenging discussion in which Jeanne E. Glesener questions the designation of the terms “small” or “minor” literatures and shows how heterogeneous small multilingual literatures can be. She offers a novel classification of “small literatures” (50–1) by

distinguishing between their regional and linguistic aspects: literatures of small countries, minority literatures, interregional literatures, literatures in small languages, and small literatures in dominant languages. Glesener's chapter is followed by Leben's account of the bilingual and multilingual practices of the Slovenes in Carinthia, the southern region of Austria. He introduces the phrase "supraregional sphere of literary interaction," (66–9) which bypasses attributions related to nation or kinship and concentrates instead on regional belonging, multilingual writing practices and specific conditions of production and reception. The phrase is related to semiotic and social theories of space (such as those proposed by Michel Foucault, Edward Soja, Homi Bhabha, and Henri Lefebvre) and builds upon a larger empirical base of accounts of Carinthian Slovenian literature. The reader can assess the plausibility of the phrase in further chapters which present case studies based on the same concept.

Another chapter that offers a wider conceptual framework that can be used in analysing literary multilingualism universally is written by Sandra Vlasta and comes later in the volume. Vlasta's chapter adds an important layer to the discussion of multilingualism in the region by discussing migration literature that is rooted in more recent developments of globalization. Vlasta organizes multilingualism into three distinct levels: elements found in other languages in the text, multilingualism as a topic that a text deals with, and multilingualism in the process of the production.

The other chapters in the volume offer a wide range of research questions regarding multilingualism. The reader can find case studies both on regional specifics of literary multilingualism as well as on certain aspects related to the phenomenon of multilingualism in literature in general. Some chapters (such as those by Erwin Köstler, Elena Messner, Lidija Dimkovska, and Felix Oliver Kohl) address larger societal questions related to the publishing and reception of literature dealing with multilingualism. Individual and societal multilingualism is shown to be influenced by cultural memory and identity, as well as by the dynamics of literary markets. Dominik Srienc's chapter serves as an example, describing ways the younger generation of Carinthian Slovenes overcomes and plays with linguistic and regional borders. By using new media and two languages as a means of communication, the young authors seem to proclaim their dual, bilingual identity in their writings. However, the German language as a "super-central language" (Glesener, 50), having a higher market value, has too many benefits to offer to young writers compared to the position of Slovenian in the global language hierarchy. Srienc avoids dogmatic claims, stating simply that Carinthian Slovenian literature is in a fluid state of different transformational processes.

An interesting look at the perception of multilingual literature is offered by Kohl, whose biographical account of exogenous writers in the region helps

define Carinthian Slovenian literature today. Since literary histories are mostly influenced by a nation-state mindset, the bilingual and dual identity of some authors is difficult to pinpoint and might result in simplification. Next to larger societal contexts, individual choices of bilingual authors as well as the functions of multilingualism in literary texts and self-translation are addressed in the volume. In Vanessa Hanneschläge's chapter on the functions of multilingualism in Peter Handke's work, Carinthian literature is left aside and issues of identity are only of secondary interest. Hanneschläge gives an inspiring account of the increase of multilingualism in Handke's dramas over time. The diachronic overview is supported by statistics and interpretations. This chapter offers itself as a valuable reference for comparative work in the future.

A number of chapters deal with questions of the entanglement of language use and identity in past and present times, in ways that make the reader wish that the entire volume was more strongly interlinked between chapters, dealing with ways of expression of multilingualism in literary texts and with its functions on the level of text analysis (Hanneschläge, Alenka Koron, Vlasta).

Regarding the examples of multilingualism in literary texts provided in the chapters of the volume, it becomes clear that scholars of literary multilingualism would benefit from a more detailed typology of the subject to distinguish between different ways in which it manifests in literature. Till Dembeck and Rolf Parr's *Literatur und Mehrsprachigkeit* (2017), which is repeatedly used as a reference for a classification of multilingualism in literary texts, remains vague in its differentiation between 'code-switching' and 'code-mixing' in literature. The same can be said about Yasemin Yildiz, whose work *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012) is also often quoted in the volume. Research in fictional literature, where synchronic and diachronic aspects of language-contact phenomena are used in artistic ways, has proven to have difficulties adapting terms from sociolinguistics, where different types of 'code-switching' are distinguished, and this term is held apart from lexical borrowing, loan translation, lexical change and interference. In order to enable interdisciplinary work, it might be beneficial to describe the terminological field in a more coherent way.

To sum up, the volume is an important source for comparative studies and provides a good overview of different aspects and methods that are currently used for studying literary multilingualism. The book also contains some challenges of multilingualism on a practical level—some chapters which are translated into German do not use the same theoretical literature and discuss issues of belonging and identity from different positions than other authors of the volume. This discrepancy can most likely be explained with differences in the reception and scholarship of literature in the academic cultures that the authors come from.

Throughout the volume, the reader is confronted with historical as well as linguistic encounters and hegemonies which prove the complexity of south-eastern European history. The linguistic and cultural complexity of the region targeted in the volume seems to be unique if viewed from the local perspective. If observed from another part of Eastern Europe, such as the Baltic region, the multilingual togetherness as well as otherness, along with its cultural impact as discussed in the volume, seems to be a unifying rather than a distinguishing marker for the whole area of Eastern Europe.

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Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism*. New York: Routledge, 2022. ISBN 9780367279189. 426pp. \$US 250.

The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism (2021) presents the first comprehensive study in the English-speaking world of the phenomenon of translingual writing. Having worked together on numerous projects as authors, editors, conference organizers, bibliographers, and international lecturers for more than a decade, and having forged a community of translingual literature scholars, Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich have put translingual literature on the critical, contemporary map. Though literary translingualism is not a new phenomenon, the handbook gives it focus, coherence, breadth, and global reach, as well as a clear identity. Kellman and Lvovich's mission, visible in their joint endeavor to elevate translingual literature to the level of a field of study, has been consecrated in the handbook.

In this fascinating, voluminous book, the editors have brought together a host of leading specialists in this field to investigate translingual literature in a wide variety of languages and countries spanning ancient and modern times. This ancient practice, as the book demonstrates, has been taken up with vigor in the global age by contemporary writers who cross new linguistic frontiers. In ten parts and twenty-nine chapters, the reader, whether a scholar, a student, or any other inquisitive thinker, is given an overview of the multifaceted phenomenon of literary translingualism. Indeed, most of the articles in this volume reiterate the editors' concern for a comprehensive interdisciplinary investigation of the issue by combining diverse approaches such as historical, linguistic, and aesthetic perspectives. The arrangement of the chapters helps the reader grasp the breadth and reach of translingual writing and the multiple issues that underpin this phenomenon related to history, geography, or to authors' biographies. The book's theoretical framework is multilayered, on the one hand, examining translingual literary genres, ancient, postclassical, and universal literary translingualism, as well as self-translation, and on the other hand, investigating literary multilingualism in European, Middle Eastern, and Asian languages and in geographical spaces (Africa and Latin America).

The preface puts forward a succinct survey of the field, while the first part, "Translingual Genres," opens the volume with three primary genres: memoir, poetry, and fiction. The opening chapter of part I, Mary Besemeres's "Translingual Memoir," shows how prevalent this genre is among translingual writers, and draws the reader's attention to memoirs written in European languages other than English. Likewise, Alice Loda and Antonio Viselli's contribution, "Translingualism and Poetry," highlights heterolingual traditions inherent in translingualism. The authors return to the phenomenon of "poetic multilin-

gualism,” the alternation of different languages within one poem, without applying a rigid distinction from poetic translingualism per se, which could make the reader ponder on how translingualism and multilingualism overlap and diverge. Though part I is not totally exhaustive in terms of generic exploration, fiction is also examined in this part. Its generic specificity along with theme and style are explored in Fiona Doloughan’s “Literary Translingualism and Fiction,” which considers twentieth- and twenty-first-century works resulting from “patterns of migration” (31). Doloughan refers to a wide array of writers emphasizing linguistic and metalinguistic awareness, as well as a vital issue in translingual literature: translation, in both its literal and metaphorical dimensions.

The two chapters in part X of the book, modestly titled “Issues in Literary Translingualism,” follow up the issue of translation and self-translation (“Self-Translation”), and the stylistic features of the genre (“Metaphors of Literary Translingualism”). In the former, Eva Gentes and Trish Van Bolderen highlight the necessity for scholarship to move beyond individual case studies, which is a central theme of the volume. In the latter, Rainer Guldin shows that the translingual imagination seems to converge in recurrent metaphors, most apt to convey “the painful but liberating split” (382) experienced by translingual writers. Indeed, the linguistic split is an issue that has already drawn some critical attention but needs to be further investigated in translingual literature. Another possible topic for future exploration is the psychic split in translingual writers, which has been undertheorized in literature. Though Guldin does not linger on the split, he paves the way for an examination of the discursive and aesthetic characteristics of the genre while pointing to the necessity to systemize the study of the translingual novel and short story.

Cognizant of the linguistic complexity of the ancient world, and the subjectivities involved in the interpretation of the past, Eleni Bozia and Alex Mullen’s “Literary Translingualism in the Greek and Roman Worlds” addresses for the first time Greco-Roman literary production in terms of translingualism. The article makes clear that the concept of translingualism facilitates the work of scholars, allowing them to pinpoint specific cultural contexts.

From the Greco-Roman world, the reader can travel to the Persianate one. In “Literary Translingual Practices in the Persianate world: Past and Present,” Alaaeldin Mahmoud discusses classical Persia and the Muslim Persianate context up to the present day. While the Persianate world offers a plethora of linguistic encounters, Sanskrit literature is a category of its own. In “The Curious Case of Sanskrit Literary Translingualism,” Deven M. Patel reminds the reader that Sanskrit is by no means a “dead” language but remains a literary marginal one, and as such it has been internationalized. The curious situation that this marginal internationalization presents offers food for further thought.

The section on post-classical literary translingualism, which logically follows the ancient literary one, presents two cases: Medieval Jewish culture, and the trajectory of Neo-Latin in Latin America. In “Translingualism in Medieval Jewish Culture,” Ross Brann contends that though there was no Hebrew speech community, there was a Hebrew literary one. Moreover, in spite of Jewish intellectuals’ commitment to the Hebrew Language, their work also signifies a deep structural internalization, variation, and transposition of Arabic into Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic (93), a quite unique phenomenon. The blending of languages in translingual literature is also the concern of the following chapter, Leni Ribeiro Leite’s “Literary Translingualism and Neo-Latin: The Case of Latin America.” As Leite demonstrates, the same interplay between vernaculars and Latin in Europe continued in Latin America.

But while Latin was a natural language, Esperanto, an artificial language, has also been used as a tool of literary expression. Thus, it finds a natural place within this volume, as Fiedler’s “Literary Translingualism in Esperanto” establishes. The presence of Esperanto, responsive to the authors’ search for creative enrichment, is once again a case of its own.

The five parts that focus on European, Middle Eastern, and Asian languages as well as on the literary translingual landscape in South Africa, constitute the greatest part of the volume. Part v, “Literary Translingualism in European Languages,” is the longest part of the book, but enough attention is also given to translingualism in Africa and Latin America as well as in Middle Eastern and Asian languages, which discourages critiques of Eurocentrism. Surprisingly, a specific chapter on translingual writers in the United States, a country in which translingual writing has flourished, is absent. Similarly, a short introductory editorial text at the beginning of each part, explaining the editors’ choices and what has been left out, could have been useful for the reader. It might clarify why, for instance, a chapter on drama, one of the primary genres, is missing. Likewise, a conclusive chapter presenting the general trends and characteristics of translingual writing could have had a lingering impact on the reader.

However, as the first comprehensive study of translingual literature in its continuity from the ancient times to our contemporary era, the handbook not only firmly establishes this field of studies but also provides an invaluable guide into translingual literature for beginners and advanced students alike. Scholars, too, will find in this handbook precious methodological tools. Gentes and Van Bolderen, for instance, suggest that it would be very useful for a translator to study how self-translators tackle heterolingualism. The handbook makes clear that the translingual perspective is not simply enlightening and enriching but is also indispensable to fully understanding translingual literature.

Finally, the book offers a pledge that the postmonolingual imagination that ultimately emerges may nudge our conflict-ridden societies toward a transcultural condition. For the merit of the volume goes far beyond the qualities of its individual articles, with their highly informative and evaluative tenor: it highlights the fact that the translingual phenomenon is gaining precious ground in terms of literary production and the ensuing literary studies. Reading in and out of this handbook leads the reader through the maze of languages and toward the contemplation of a space after Babel.

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