The Polyglot Manifesto

Critical Thesis

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pol·y·glot

/ˈpälēˌglät/

adjective

adjective: **polyglot**

1. knowing or using several languages.

"a polyglot entrepreneur"

(of a book) having text in several languages.

"polyglot and bilingual technical dictionaries"

noun

noun: **polyglot**; plural noun: **polyglots**

1. a person who knows and is able to use several languages.

(mid 17th century: from French *polyglotte*, from Greek *poluglōttos*, from *polu-* ‘many’ + *glōtta* ‘tongue.’)

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I. INTRODUCTION (DIATRIBE)

On the back of US minted pennies—depending on the year, above the Lincoln monument or on a crest—reads the phrase “E Pluribus Unum.” Every American brought up in public school is taught this Latin expression. It translates as, “Out of Many, One”; and serves as the guiding principle of our thesis, a discourse in diatribe. <A penny to continue.> Por favor.

THESIS PENNY

This essay proposes one thing: that writers write more. We should be encouraged to express the full force of our vocabularies, lexicons, and polyphonic identities. We should be exempt from external considerations, including those of the fickle reader, the rigid businessmen, and the haughty critic. Writers should turn to academia for refuge, should turn to artist retreats for sanctuaries, and should turn unto themselves for answers. This essay has no answers. This essay has only spit and fodder. Fodder for the artists and spit for those who with narrow minds limit creativity, put up stumbling blocks, respond “Thank you for submitting,” or straight tell us, “No.” To them, we say, “Yes!” Listen. There is a voice inside us all, a new American voice, a voice synonymous with multilingualism, an artifact of multiculturalism, the sound of the polyglot: furious, exquisite, shining, rough, tough, American, so American, too American, but today in doubt, today under attack. Assemble, polyglots!

We must write more, even more in our many languages, despite the deniers, naysayers and monomaniacal minds in their monolinguistic purgatory. Writer’s block is hell. Artistic freedom is heaven. Where are you? (Cross with the obol under your tongue.) Here are we:

multilingual art finds itself today so ubiquitous—as dark and deep as the oceans that surround us—that the hymns of the polyglot have been taken for granted for decades here in America, perhaps longer, yet now call out as never before. This paper calls things for what there are, ergo manifesto. We define multilingual as anything polyglot—knowing or using more than one language—especially in text, even if knowing or using only one word, one sentence, one paragraph, or chapter, or a whole book in another language except for one word in English. (Out of many, one.) This very paragraph has been monolingual, but not gratuitously, for now. “Good morning, America.” Hark, and behold. “Hi, how are you?” Bonjour. Hola. Hallo. Ciao. Olá. Namaste. Salaam. Здравствуйте. <Take a penny.> De nada.

After the polyglot has been armed, rolling these papers into a megaphone, our aim is to broaden the term polyglot to include—that is, recruit—anyone willing to adopt a foreign language. You want to learn a new language? Write in it! We hereby reduce what is “foreign,” and expand our minds. “Dream is destiny.” Destiny is domestic. We will ourselves to personify unity, by embracing our differences. We bow in mutual respect for one another, for individuality, for uniqueness, without sacrificing understanding, or connection, or the genre that agrees to disagree. We sweat not to dam rivers, but to build bridges. Bamboozle us no more, chauvinist: English is not the official language of the United States any more than the name “America” came from an American. Damn those who are blind, deaf and dumb to the polyglot voice, to history. We lend ourselves to them in braille if we have to, in American Sign Language, in cartoons if we have to—the Polyglot Manifesto must seem a carnival of hand signs and double-entendres to them. It’s been this way for years. Nay? Convince me otherwise, fools, lest ye encounter your own barney within the ensuing dialogue. Till then, an outline to hold your hand. <Leave a penny.> Gracias.

First, we will examine three arguments against multilingual writing, consider their validity, and discuss their incompleteness, for though they have served us in the past, they will fail us moving forward.

Second, we will offer three arguments in favor of multilingual writing, which serve for fuel on our quest to express the new American voice.

Third, we will present a series of examples of multilingual art from around the word—in literature, music, and film—draw from their historical context, and analyze their effectiveness, all to suggest that there does exist a precedent for today's polyglots who have always, and will always, create multilingual art, despite the gag and censor of prejudice. Its strong arm, the lingua franca, frankly limiting, can be defeated in an arm wrestle. <This is the game; the bet a penny; the winner defines "One," and moves on to the next round.> Uno, dos, tres.

We will close this carnival match with a soliloquy, and a token of multilingual prose.

Busybodies may skip to this final section; but scholars read on; everyone else, we spit in your mouths! No coin for you. (Beware, the tone may change, but the mood stay the same.)

Let us begin. <Play.> Ándale.

II. DIALOGUE ON MULTILINGUAL ART

A. ARGUMENTS AGAINST MULTILINGUAL WRITING

1. Keep your reader's comfort in mind when writing

Consider the old adage about dinner conversations at the embassy. "Why," asks etiquette, "speak a second language unless your aim is to conceal, or slander, or plain make someone feel uncomfortable?" The best conversations are the ones that include everyone at the table, surely, and not the type that excludes anybody, or any group of people. Hence, the need for a lingua franca. We see how this argument applies to prose writing, when one of literature's highest goals is to unite readers.

Or consider the oath writers take in the Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman film, *Adaptation.*, about the struggle to adapt a literary novel into a commercial film. The oath begins: "Rule number one: respect thy reader."[1] As twins, one Nicolas Cage character tells the other Nicolas Cage character he wants to become a writer just like him. The former enrolls in lecture courses designed to teach writers how to become "successful," following a twelve steps program and the oath. Pinning it by his desk, the would-be author plots points until completing his first book, which goes on to attract the attention of industry professionals, presumably because the book was written expressly for a large audience, and because it adhered to the set of rules, and the prescriptive oath. The more artistic brother, dedicated to originality and ingenuity, is dumb-struck to find his twin brother achieve any recognition, much less land a book deal, meanwhile he suffers to adapt this "winding," lyrical novel into a Hollywood blockbuster.

Young and experienced writers alike may consider such a premeditated regiment for producing works of art, seduced by the promise of fame and fortune, however formulaic the steps are, so long as "it works." But what happens when you press this rule further?

Forget that when you write for the reader, you stop writing for yourself. Forget that when you write for "the reader," you write for a figment of your imagination. Often our writing fails, even when we know exactly who the receiver will be. In emails with an explicit addressee, how often are our drafts effective, or even communicative, simply because we "kept the reader in mind"? In text messaging you have the receiver's name at the top of the composition—yet how often is the text message a great message for it? In these quotidian examples, illustrating the crudest forms of written communication, we see how following "Rule number one: respect thy reader" doesn't necessitate good communication. There are other considerations, perhaps even higher, more elementary rules we must aim at to produce good writing.

List your favorite movies, or songs, or books, the ones that have touched you the deepest—you may feel that they were made just for you, with you in mind, that they speak to your hearts, that they could have been your very words; yet did your names ever cross the author's writing desk? Were you ever considered by the film director? Were you in the studio winking at the recording artist through the soundproof glass, encouraging the hit summer song to completion? Not at all. And yet we connect deeply, personally with art, despite this separation. It is a great mystery of art that we needn't be in the artist's consciousness at the moment of creation for it to be transcendental—that is, for the work of art to "feel" directed toward us. We trust the artist to create, just as the artist trusts us to judge, consume, and enjoy, without the prerequisite of "having us in mind." (Trust between artist and audience is "faith in," not "consideration for.")

This does not mean that respect for the reader is incompatible with any other virtue, only that it isn't "number one."

Creation and reception—like sending and receiving—are inherently separate activities, where one should not consider the other at its inception, only halfway, at the moment of sharing.

The argument has been made in general, but it applies especially in the case of multilingual writing. Polyglots hold impunity over audiences unwilling to meet them halfway. If a monolingual reader—and there are many, for now—skips over your foreign language, he loses the right to judge your work overall. When a monolingual reader asks you to write in a common language, to not use the language that comes most spontaneously and sincerely from you, they are gagging you. Do not be gagged. Respect the readers by being simple and honest. These are the higher virtues; morality, justice and purity are other higher virtues than plain, premeditated consideration for the reader. Artists will do well to speak their hearts and minds, even their polyglot hearts and minds, for the benefit of art itself.

"Fine, the artist can write anything and in any language," enters the retort, "but what does the work mean to me if it feels foreign? Why buy it?"

2. Being realistic in today's publishing landscape

"Want to write for the widest audience?" we hear. "Write in the most common language."

How many writers have dropped their native tongue, immigrated to an evidently more stable country, contributed art to a more popular culture? It pays more to write in English.[2] Why not write in the language that our own money employs, reading those crisp green letters?

According to *Publishers Weekly*, 690 million books were sold in 2017.[3] But how many books sold were in a language other than English? According the *Association of American Publishers*, ours is a multi-billion dollar industry.[4] But how much went to writers of non-English languages? These questions, unfortunately, are not answered by the most widely gathered analytics. Viewed this way, one could easily assume English conquers all—“So, write in English.”

To explore this rift between truth and assumption, we need to visit the general equation between writer and reader: the distribution channel (including, but not limited to, the publisher, the retailer, and the faithful truck driver in between), which, seems to suggest that writers write in the dominant language, that readers read only what they already know, that American society only values English.

Recall the three branches of government and their duty to one another, their “checks and balances.” Legislation is passed in congress, execution of those laws is carried out by the White House, while the judicial third of our government holds these laws accountable to the highest law of the land. Though these three branches monitor one another, none usurp. There is no game of “Rock, paper, scissors.” Similarly should the process between writer, distributor, and reader, work. No one entity overpowers the other, unless there is a corruption in one, during the lifecycle of a book. The middlemen, therefore, must not command the writer, any more than they should gouge the reader; instead they should hold their function. The readers, too, should not gag the writer, any more than they should not pirate retailers; instead they should hold their function.

Ideally: the writer writes, creates; the readers read, critique; the distributors print, publish.

The comparison to the branches of government is an oversimplification, but it is meant to illustrate that the industry needn't put constraints on the artist.* Not, what can the writer do for the industry; but what can the industry do for us? We need a balance between the branches of government, because only a healthy government can fulfill its higher purpose: to serve the American people. Likewise, the book industry needs a healthy balance to perform its duty.

The higher purpose of the book industry is, and always has been, to preserve culture. The business of books, like the economy in general, is subject to culture.† Culture isn't the by-product of a healthy society, but the evidence thereof. Literature, a subset of culture, exists to safeguard against ignorance, to preserve human expression, and mint the value of our shared beliefs. Narrow literature conscripts shallow thinking. Broad literature embodies rich culture.

But what would happen if all the literature produced by our country were in one language? In New York City alone, eight-hundred languages are spoken.[5] Does English alone encapsulate those cultures? From New Mexico, to Minnesota, to Chinatown, San Francisco, there are dense pockets of diverse cultures. According to the Census Bureau, English, only the de facto language of the United States, spoken by only 240 million Americans, doesn't even represent its full population of 325 million. America does need to assimilate its diverse population, to unite its people under a common language, like a banner. But even stars and stripes is multi-starred, multi-striped. As stated in the introduction, a new language composed of multiple languages can be our nation's contribution to itself: a new *American* language, not English, but American—to unite us.

One might sympathize with the rage to hold English as our dominant language, if we were living in the past, in an era of bigotry and isolation. But today's culture is multilingual. [6]

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* In our case, they ought not to perpetuate monolingual literature.

† Please see: Said E. Dawlabani's book *MEMEnomics: The Next-Generation Economic System*

The future is multilingual. The rage and the craze, then, should be to want our literature to represent us all.

To answer the earlier retort about purchasing multilingual writing, printing multilingual writing—granting that it should and can be written—we simply say that it should because we must.[*] In a country that already fosters a diversity of cuisine and consumer products, today's book market is hungry for multilingual art. "You should care," a polyglot responds, "because to care is the right thing to do." Or if that isn't enough: "You should care, because you have the right to care." Let your library echo the truth.

Publishing landscapes change, but its purpose never will.

3. Consider your style before writing in another language: a peek at a writing guide.

The New Yorker called the *Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White, "a nonpareil: direct, correct, and delightful." Devotees of this book will attest to its brilliance. It outlined the elementary rules of usage, the elementary principles of composition, and offered a final section, titled "An Approach to Style."[7] In it we find a list of suggestions for writing, not so much rules but insights "from a writer's experience of writing"; such as, "2. Write in a way that comes natural," "11. Do not explain too much," and "16. Be clear." The guidelines detailed in "An approach to Style" actually support the thesis of this very paper, except for one, number "20. Avoid foreign languages."

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[*] "Buy it just because," here, might appear like a pale argument in favor of purchasing multilingual books. The goal of this section is to present arguments against and for multilingual writing, to take the smallest steps towards acknowledging its validity. For longer steps, a survey of precedents, and a section on how these voices can be valuable to the American reader, beyond "just because," please continue reading.

> The writer will occasionally find it convenient or necessary to borrow from other languages. Some writers, however, from sheer exuberance or desire to show off, sprinkle their work liberally with foreign expressions, with no regard for the reader's comfort. It is a bad habit. Write in English.

Clearly Strunk and White are, as in a previously stated argument, concerned with the reader's comfort; but at the heart of their argument is their concern for style. Citing the words, "sheer exuberance" and "sprinkle liberally," the problem Strunk and White tackle is the lack of rigor in a writer. No meaningful writing is arbitrary, that is to say gratuitous. If it's true that some of the world's greatest inventions were discovered by accident, it cannot be argued that their vast distribution or their refinement came at the fumble or pirouette of a careless dilettante. While scatological, free-associative, even frivolous writing has its place in the artist's studio, in the case of polished prose, our thesis aligns with Strunk and White's: necessity supersede carelessness. Rule 20 is great advice, save for its last sentence.

We amend the rule, then: write in any or in as many languages as you want, when and where it is convenient and necessary to do so.

It should go without saying that a writer must "work from a suitable design," as is recommended in the style guide. A writer does well to clip the frayed ends of his first draft, or to "tear a piece to ribbons," during the editing stage. No unwanted clauses, no tricky prepositions should make their way into the finished piece. But if a writer maintains his rigor, aware of the movements of his thoughts on paper, why not write in the many languages of his mind?

Isn't it more convenient for an American writer whose first language isn't English, to write in that first language? If your design aims at English-only readers, maybe not. But if your design aims at contemporary polyglot readers, maybe yes.

Isn't it necessary for the protagonist of a story to be portrayed speaking the language of his personality? If your design aims for realism, yes; but if your design caters to monolingual

markets in decline, which favor transparency over reality, "getting it" over "understanding it," maybe not.

I hope the reader has been moved away from the arguments against multilingual writing, but if not, let him be convinced by the introduction to *The Elements of Style* itself, which maintains that its rules, like the rules imposed on polyglots, can be broken. Sometimes the best coup de grâce is the hara-kiri.

> Professor Strunk, although one of the most inflexible and choosy of men, was quick to acknowledge the fallacy of inflexibility and the danger of doctrine. "It is an old observation," he wrote, "that the best writers sometimes disregard the rules of rhetoric. When they do so, however, the reader will usually find in the sentence some compensating merit, attained at the cost of the violation. Unless he is certain of doing as well, he will probably do best to follow the rules.

When a writer breaks a rule, he must do it with a purpose, and compensate the steadfast reader for the violation; even if the reader isn't the "number one" concern of the prose, even when the industry correctly performs its duty, the writer does best to move forward with confidence, to put on paper the multiple voices of his imagination if it will deliver the goods.

What's the compensation of breaking away from English? What's the value of multilingual writing? Let us continue the conversation by offering three positive arguments in favor of our thesis.

B. ARGUMENTS FOR MULTILINGUAL WRITING

1. The writer's search for pure language

Privy to the old arguments, Walter Benjamin begins his "Task of the Translator"[8] essay with a provocative statement: "In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful." It appears the German linguist and philosopher of the late 20th century disagrees with "Rule number one: respect thy reader." What Benjamin seeks, as we shall see, is a more noble virtue: pure language.

(A moment of reflection: In our day and age, with languages adapting, dying, surviving; with newer and faster modes of interaction; and with people writing more than ever before; it might be tempting to begin our defense of polyglot art with a concrete purpose, some tangible benefit, a resounding answer to the question, "So what?" We know cultures are mixing and art blending, so what? We know artist mix languages, and regular folks too, so what? A definite response here may best position polyglots to best defend their mission to others. But amongst ourselves, we are interested in a more ultimate goal, something timeless and pure. It will suit us to lead with an abstract goal, then. We return to Benjamin.)

Any one language is a backyard the writer will necessarily, in his quest for the right word or phrase, have to escape. The intention of a writer precedes the material of language (feelings come first, words later; thoughts come first, words later). Tracing back the genealogy of language, there must have existed a very few number, if not a first and only language. The Tower of Babel makes a metaphor of this, as Benjamin notes.[9] The writer might pine for such a unity, one boundless field in which to roam and share ideas and forecasts with his fellow man. But

today, this is not the case. Any one language by its very nature excludes the rest. We are fenced in. Languages cannot interact without conflict. To understand why, we make a distinction between meaning and communication: communication being transitive; meaning being inherent.

Take the English and Spanish words to describe the wheat product we use to make sandwiches, a word which differs in each language on two different levels. “Bread” and “pan” both sound and look different, though share the same meaning. A more subtle difference in communication can be found between Spanish and French. The Spanish word “pan” and the French word “pain,” though look different, sound the same. The Spaniard and the Frenchman can share a verbal symbol but not a written symbol. Their languages still exclude one another. Enter the writer’s conundrum—a particular conflict for Englishmen against Spanish or French writers, who must weigh the above written words with his understanding of the English prefix “pan-” and the English word “pain,” to say nothing of his inability to politely ask for a slice of bread, simply because of the language he was born into.

The writer’s abstract but laudable aim is to express objective reality, beyond the incongruent modes (languages) of describing them, reaching instead for a single, pure, coherent utterance that could be understood by all.[*]

If “pan” and “pain” confound some readers but not others, it follows that distinct languages are not only different, but mutually exclusive. You cannot use your words to signify to a reader of another language your meaning. An obvious point here belabored, which is here clarified to understand what Benjamin does in his essay: that the Frenchmen, the Spaniard, and the Englishmen are all pointing to the same baked wheat at the center of the table, yet share the

[*] “How can I say what I want to say, so that you and you and you ‘get it’?” the writer asks himself.

misfortune of having learned three excluding symbols for that object, and thus any individual language, on its own, is inadequate. Unless we find a means to communicate, we will starve.

What Benjamin calls “pure language” is the means of directly reaching for the loaf itself, in the most effective way possible, in order to share it with the rest of the group, to bring everyone together.

One might mistakenly assume that the loudest or most effective language is the purest language. But, again, any one language is inadequate. It consists of a set of pre-established symbols that cater to a pre-defined population of never-changing readers, and yet there are no such unchanging populations, and no perfectly attainable sets of ready symbols.

Despite the challenge of imposing it on the rest of the world, monolinguals still insist everyone speak their language, without returning the favor of learning someone else’s. They are also the ones to argue that prefect prose would be unified—sure, to their standard, entirely in English—and not become some broken thing, composed of different languages. They ask, “Wouldn’t a pure language be a single language, like in the Genesis story?”

Before answering this question, it pays to examine the relationship between two symbiotic kinds of artists, as Benjamin does in his essay: between the poet and the translator. An understanding of their relationship will simultaneously yield a deeper understanding of what art accomplishes through their union, and prove our first argument in favor of multilingualism: that polyglot writing is purer writing than monolingual writing.

“The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, manifest,” writes Benjamin; “that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational.” While a poet is interested in linguistic approaches to portraying emotion, psychologies, and truth, a translator is interested in something higher. Clearly a translator needs a poet, or else there is no work to translate; but what Benjamin

claims is that for the work of the poet to go beyond itself, the work just as much needs a translator.

Benjamin describes how great art has an “afterlife.” If the conception of a work of art is the artist’s struggle to birth her work, then the work’s debut marks the start of its life. Most books come and go, are read and then forgotten, but a select few go on to have an “afterlife”—book reviews, critical analysis, or induction into school curriculums, just to list a few examples of a work’s “afterlife.” Translation, claims Benjamin, is as integral to a poem’s “afterlife” as these other functions. Translation doesn’t operate in the narrow way non-translators view it. Translation isn’t a word-for-word ditto, or even a trusty interpretation, but an art form unto itself that fulfills an extraordinary calling: giving art more life. But not only that. Something else emerges from the union of poet and translator that benefits their respective languages for the better.

Recall the wood analogy painted by Benjamin in his essay, where a poet stands in the middle of a forest, whereas a translator is outside facing the wooded ridge. Their interaction proves fruitful, because of their relative location in the forest, their interaction with it, and a shared intention. But let’s draw another analogy to reinforce his point.

Image a hermit who spends his days detailing the trees of his surroundings onto a map. The man is devoted to the land, studies it, breathes it, and even has an ethical stake in portraying his beloved wood with excruciating detail—just as any serious poet takes her own words and language seriously. How does the final map at the end of the hermit’s life contribute to the map of the larger region, though, or to Cartography as a whole? Here enters the state department, and various other characters, whose duty it is to incorporate and review all the maps of the land. A cartographer from the nearest village is hired. This outside cartographer doesn’t need to be the

hermit's friend, or even someone who is native to the forest itself, but someone who lives for the higher purpose of cartography: the joining of maps. This cartographer will borrow, redraw, copy, embellish, but mostly frame what has already been done by the hermit, faithful to his world, as well as the larger world.

The provincial hermit is the poet. The urban cartographer is the translator. Their combined map forms a greater map.

The translator brings an old work of art to a new audience. The translator, by analyzing and articulating an original message into a second iteration, enlarges both languages' understanding of one another, and of themselves. Enriching both cultures, the translator enlarges art, and strengthens the connection between the languages. Critics have credited Borges, an avid translator and polyglot, with expanding the Spanish language when he faithfully introduced Spanish readers to the language of Faulkner.[10] One sees Faulkner's unique style echoed in Borges's stories, and in the stories by the writers influenced by Borges. These two titans weren't limited to their own languages or worlds, they redrew them entirely.

Bearing in mind how a source language and a target language interact from the poetic work to the translation, notice how the ultimate goal of this exchange is the end of multilingualism itself, a reach for purer language, a voice that can communicate with the largest quantity of people.

Individual languages have always adapted to express their epochs: new words like "capitalism," "subconscious," "the internet," or the Oxford Dictionary's word of 2017, "youthquake," are testaments to the evolution of the English language, pegged to the very movements that defined each era. Individual languages adopt the words and phrases of other languages to explain concepts discovered by those other cultures: "karaoke" from the Japanese,

"cookie" from the Dutch, and "paparazzi" from the Italian are all examples of an expansion in English. The same could be said, if not to a greater degree, about the influence of the English language over other languages.

Imagine translating fiancé for an English equivalent, or ordering a pancake when what you wanted was a savory French crêpe. You wouldn't. So let the Englishman call that loaf "pan" if he would like to offer a slice to his Spanish friend, or use the French word "pain" if he would like to ask the Frenchmen to cut him a piece—the one with a handle on the most words in most languages has the purest language overall.

2. Polyphony: the evolution from monophonic novels, the advance from monolingual writing

It is said that you should write about what you know. So if you only know one language, write only in one language. Or if you know more than one, write in your best one and be done. Of course this essay aims for something higher than writing what you know, or sticking to what you're best at. It asks, "Why limit yourself?" Monolingualism, like narrowmindedness, is flat.

In the 1920's Russian scholar and critic Mikhail Bakhtin gave a compelling account on the literature and artistic vision of Dostoevsky.[11] Polyphony in music, as is commonly understood, is multi-voiced choral singing. In literature, similarly, polyphony employs distinct voices in dialogue with one another, often times in constant opposition, but in constant contact none the less. One need only review the scenes of the brothers Karamazov meeting with Father Zossima, their talk of love, and how various their opinions are, how uncountable the interjections seem, with unannounced breaks in scene to invite other speakers to join the conversation, or to

exit the room, or to hear a poor mother tell their story—all fastened together by Dostoevsky, to form a multi-voiced philosophical treaties on the subject at hand.[12]

As polyphonic as Dostoevsky was, utilizing various personalities to clash with one another, so must the polyglot draft a new vision of art: polyphonic creation composed of multiple languages—or as Bakhtin put it, “a unity standing above the word, above the voice, above the accent.” Something new, combining different languages. This, as we shall see later, has already begun. The argument contained in this section holds that Bakhtin, through his analysis of Dostoevsky, gave us a literary call to action: don’t be mono, be polylingual in your art.

To paraphrase the Russian literature scholar, Val Vinokur: it is a mistake to equate *The Notes from the Underground* with autobiography. The novella wasn’t the author’s point of view of the world, but a wholly new voice external to what Dostoevsky considered right, or wrong. [13] The brilliance of the book’s nameless character belies in the fact that it isn’t the novelist saying those things—as one might express himself in a personal letter—and yet no one else could have created such a dejected governmental clerk. The character, as a consciousness (to borrow Bakhtin’s word), stands alone, a fully realized, polyphonic, self-contradicting individual, without the need of any biographical understanding of its author—unlike previous authors, whose work was often didactic, single-voiced, clearly the work of “one man” or “one woman.”

Dostoevsky wrote not “what he knew” but what his characters “knew,” thus layering numerous, reversing voices. The connection to multilingualism is obvious: an author can use other languages in a composition to achieve polyphony; must necessarily do so, if he is willing to explore multi-voiced art forms, or go beyond himself to create a separate consciousness for a character. Polyglot writing could portray other cultures, or even other Americans with distinct backgrounds from one’s own; could be used to push the creative envelope and give voice to

other languages in dialogue or interior monologue: so long as the flow of English were interrupted, another language introduced, then brought back to home: as a polyphonic choir does.

Bakhtin identifies the defining trait of Dostoevsky's characters as their fatal solipsism: their tragedy is not being able to escape their singular view of the world. In his novels, opinions clash, faiths are taken to the edge, people die. A similar barrier exists enclosing the monolingual writer; only his barrier can be overcome when pushed to write from the inside out, to reach for a polyphony of languages, already present in the real world, giving voice to people unlike himself.

Dostoevsky tasked himself with presenting disparate camps from various social orders. His artistic statement depicted these camps as unfiltered as possible, untranslated, unabridged, and one novel at a time: creating a natural, multi-voiced, and multilayered universe. If the real world we live in today is as multifaceted as Dostoevsky saw his—through his artistic lens—or is more multifaceted than ever before, then it is the responsibility of today's writers to write polyphonically, to describe the world objectively, without their own language biases.

There are critics, surely, of the Russian novelist, those who take it upon themselves to position their art as far away from him as possible. But even these critics cannot deny polyphony, just because they despise the artist that birth it. Polyphony, as understood by Bakhtin, was an artistic vision that went beyond its creator. Dostoevsky's novels do build on the work of previous writers, do stem from a particular zeitgeist in Russia, which was and still is polyphonic. But Bakhtin asserts that despite these factors that label his art as timely and vital, Dostoevsky's work was of a certain genius, in that it is not based on his biology or biography, but from principles he established, thus founding an artistic vision at once his, but also timeliness and universal.

> Dostoevsky's epoch, with its concrete contradictions, and Dostoevsky's biological and social personality, with its epilepsy and ideological duality, have long since faded into the past—but the new structural principle of polyphony, discovered under these conditions, retains and will continue

> to retain its artistic significance under the completely different conditions of subsequent epochs. Great discoveries of human genius are made possible by the specific conditions of specific epochs, but they never die or lose their value along with the epochs that gave them birth.

Dostoevsky might have interacted with the capitalist, socialist, abbots and atheists, imperialists and peasants, the evil and holy realms of his society, borne witness to their stable or unstable co-existence; but ultimately, those factors did not outlast his vision: what survives are the printed pages of Dostoevsky's work, the buds of his artist vision, which the polyglot takes as fruit.

Today we have a radically new confluence of ideas and philosophies coexisting and interacting: overpopulation, overlapping cultures, a water crisis, food crisis, hyper-connectivity, the internet, social media, gun control, gender issues, identity issues, data wars, cryptocurrencies, the environment: all problems temporal, thankfully, but which we must deal with sooner rather than later, including in our art. For this a new artistic vision is needed: polyglot prose.

If 19th century gave us the lens of polyphonic literature, and the 20th century the manual to use it, then let the 21st century cradle writers who will use polyphony to forge new works of art into the future.

3. Tradition of multilingual writing

Following Bakhtin, and the call for polyphonic literature, we turn to T.S. Elliot, who once wrote in an essay titled "Tradition and the Individual Talent"[14] this time-tested statement:

> Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which

> we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.

There exists a precedent for multilingualism, a tradition, which we will survey in the following section. It aims to provide the reader with a "historical sense" of multilingual art, not just of writing, and which will serve as the third and final argument in favor of it.

III. SURVEY OF MULTILINGUAL ART (PROMENADE)

A. LITERATURE

1. The “Ice Cube” Word

After taking a look at various arguments for and against our thesis, we must examine a series of poignant examples of multilingual writing, to empower the current generation of writers to continue the polyglot tradition of multilingual writing. The following works have been selected based on two criteria: their influence, and innovation. The section is titled “Survey,” but it could easily be called “promenade,” since we will step leisurely from one example to the next, and plus it sounds more fun.

First, examples from literature. In this section we must examine the simplest use of foreign language, the single use of a word, from here on out referred to as an “ice cube” word. Echoing the “iceberg theory” of Hemingway, the single foreign word won’t symbolize seven-eighth of a novel’s entire underlying themes, but it might on a smaller scale do something similar—most effective in a short story, or chapter, not to float around an oceanic novel, but to perhaps cool a soda pop tale.

One simple example, to enter this idea, comes from the 1928 Surrealist author André Breton in his book *Nadja*.[15] The story follows the narrator on his amble through Paris, paired with black and white photographs, and his free-associative impressions of statues and the theatrical performances he attends, while eventually meeting the mysterious and alluring Nadja,

a foreign national who has run away from home and seems to drive herself and the narrator mad. Part and parcel with the madness is the "ice cube" word Breton employs to signify the siren.

> She told me her name, the one she had chosen for herself: "Nadja, because in Russian it's the beginning of the word hope, and because it's only the beginning."

A reader is tempted to search this word on Google translator, finding the full word for hope—Надежда, Nadezhda—and seeing "Nadja" is not only the beginning, but also the diminutive. But this research only detracts from the reading experience. Perhaps, thinks the first-time reader, the name will be further explained within the text. To the dismay of the novice tackling surrealism, there is no explicit definition of the name given. The word Nadja seems to float amidst a sea of impressions, and feels lost within the world Breton has casts the reader. But of course all things are connected, especially when the title of the book takes on this same name. A little fishing around and the reader will recall Russia in the 1920s, will find Nadja describing herself "without a moment's hesitation" as "the soul in limbo," and might gather from the many conversations with the narrator a sense of longing, mixed with frustration, i.e. "hope," but only the beginning.[*] In context, the name—a diminutive to a troubled small woman lost in Paris who hopes, but never really finds her bearings in life—does make sense.

But this is a passing glace at an "ice cube" word.

A deeper look at an "ice cube" word will reveal a more intricate use of multilingualism in this form. This next author follows Hemingway directly in the lineage of 20th century novelists. Perhaps the fact that the following example comes from a "student" of Hemingway makes it particularly unique.

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[*] The book *Nadja*, considered a seminal surrealist texts, spoke to a movement of young artists living during the period between the two world wars in Europe; it makes sense that their artistic vision would share the same "half hopes" of the book's leading femme fatale.

Published in 1957, "*On the Road* is the second novel by Jack Kerouac," reads its New York Times Books review, "and its publication is a historic occasion insofar as the exposure of an authentic work of art is of any great moment in any age in which the attention is fragmented and the sensibilities are blunted by the superlatives of fashion." This review satisfies this essay's criteria for a sampled work of art. We will dive into a section of *On the Road* because of what it did with language, bringing together all the quirks and dysfunctions of a generation of post-war artists by formalizing them. No one thinks of Kerouac as a multilingual writer, but he did write in other languages. Sometimes completely, other times with English. Remember, to use even one word from another language is multilingual writing.

Breezing through Part I, chapter thirteen, we find Kerouac uses the word "mañana," meaning "tomorrow" in Spanish, in a chapter that deals with time, religion, life and loss.[16]

The chapter's opening line shows a narrator concerned with time: "For the next fifteen days we were together for better or for worse." The emphasis on "worse," at the end of the sentence, suggests that things will not turn out alright in the end, though there might be some kicks along the way.

The first couple of pages takes place in southern California and follows the narrator Sal Paradise and his runaway girlfriend Terry, a four foot nine Mexican woman who carries the emotional center of the chapter. The two have met in LA, and spend a few nights there with only twenty dollars. They hope to make it to New York, but the reader doubts they will, based on how quickly their money dwindles. Sal Paradise in these pages spends time describing the west coast's "American night," the "Methodist ministers" walking about, and his own failed "Hollywood dream": "Everybody had come to make the movies, even me," says Sal.

The author here is blowing an emotional bubble, establishing the underlying themes for this section of the narrative, while also foreshadowing a split between the lovers in that they can't come to much agreement, or will hesitate until they do.

After a night with some friends, Terry and Sal "decide absolutely and once and for all what to do": they will go to New York, but first find work on a farm up north to pay for the trip. Along the highway from LA to Arcadia, unable to get even one "blessed ride," then to Bakersfield, they stop at a high-school soda fountain, where a group of boys pester Terry for being different, which forces the couple to leave out of dignity.

"With her pretty nose in the air she cut out of there and we wandered together in the *dark* up along the ditches of the highways. I carried the bags. We were breathing fog in the cold *night* air. I finally decided to hide from the world one more *night* with her, and the *morning* be damned." (Italics added.)

We are reaching the emotional watermark of the chapter, where the author has poured almost enough prose to imply a meaning.

Terry and Sal, after another "fine night" that was "heavengoing," decide to make it to the city of Sabinal, Terry's hometown, to meet her brother. They pass by a church, and the next sunny morning they meet him, Ricky: "a wild-buck Mexican hotcat with a hunger for booze, a great good kid," who "always had three or four dollars in his pocket and was happy go-lucky about things." I borrow Kerouac's illustrations of Ricky, because he is the one to introduce the American to a non-English word, but before that Ricky will show Sal the "promised land."

"Ricky had a bottle," Sal tells us, as they wander through Fresno, avoiding having to find work just yet.

"Today we drink, tomorrow we work," says Ricky. "Dah you do, man—take a shot!"

A page later, Ricky: "Tomorrow we drive back in the truck and pick it up. Man, we'll make a lot of money. Don't worry about nothing."

Then, finally, two paragraphs later: " 'Mañana,'said Ricky. 'Mañana, man we make it; have another beer, man, dah you go, dah you go!' "

Kerouac has led us to this one word, and structured the dialogue to allow the American reader to figure out the meaning as naturally as a child does, from the parallels in Ricky's speech. But what if—enters an objection—the American reader already knows this word, there is no learning. Granted, but does that mean that the word has been used gratuitously? Would the chapter have been the same if the word "tomorrow" had been used, with the characters and the plot all remaining the same except for that one word? Of course not, as we shall see, an important symbol in the story's narrative.

The introduction of "mañana" could have been, as Stunk and White wrote, arbitrary, but I argue that the word is not arbitrary, but that it acts as the talisman of the entire chapter: containing in it the hope for a better future, the putting off of work tonight for a brighter tomorrow, though in another language, suggesting this future is in a sense unattainable for the narrator.

A paragraph from the first instance of "mañana," we begin to move away from the "ice cube," back into thematic water: " 'Don't worry, man,' said big Ponzo [Ricky's friend]. 'Tomorrow we make a lot of money; tonight we don't worry.' "

Terry and Sal are not comforted by these words. Where before they were naively optimistic, the fog clouding their unforeseen split slowly dissipates, and the dream of going to New York remains just that, a dream. But until then, they give working together in California a

chance. "Terry and I gaze at the stars together and kissed. " 'Mañana,' she said. 'Everything'll be all right tomorrow, don't you think, Sal-honey, man?' " Sal replies thus:

> "Sure, baby, mañana." It was always mañana. For the next week that was all I heard—mañana, a lovely word and one that probably means heaven.

It is curious how Sal takes a stab at defining the word on his own. Is Kerouac appeasing readers normally put off by foreign words, playing on a reader's understanding of the word, or does the definition Sal give lend insight to the narrator's state of mind? In any case, I believe it illuminates the theme of this chapter of the book, while also driving the plot. Ricky continues, "Tomorrow, man, we make a lot of money; today we have a few beers. What do you say, beer?"

They head to a grape farm, then a cotton farm. Sal lives in a tent with his girlfriend and her seven-year-old son. The reader here learns about Terry, while also reaching a long description of the farm. There is nostalgia for American soil, a yearning to become like these Mexican farmers, and Sal even mentions "God," here, and the "cotton-pickers" of antebellum America. After a few days, Sal finds a new rhythm to life, he forgets the terminal dimension of his stay with Terry (he has absorbed "mañana," has joined the farmers, and put off the inevitable break up, for now). A rumor spreads about a group of "Okies" tying a man up to a tree and beating him "to a pulp with sticks" for being Mexican. Here Sal reveals his connection to Terry and her people when he explains how he, from then on, carried around a big stick[*] in case the white farmers "got the idea we Mexicans were fouling up their trailer camp. They thought I was Mexican, of course; and in a way I am." To put that statement in the present tense shows how profound those fifteen days were for Sal the narrator, perhaps even for Kerouac (a French-Canadian immigrant to America), who has always felt isolated from mainstream America yet

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[*] Kerouac might be referencing Teddy Roosevelt's turn-of-the-century foreign policy: "Speak softly, and carry a big stick."

connected to niche groups—here embodied by Terry, her family, and the marginalized Mexican farmers.

There is one more instance of the word near the end of the chapter, a page after the rumor about the "Okies." Ricky "swore he was coming to New York to join me" (a false promise); "I pictured him in New York, putting off everything till mañana." By now this word is planted in the reader's mind, untranslated, yet illustrated from many angles, allowing subtext to emerge. The repeated use of this word shows the word's spirit marking the narrator, and his joining Terry—only to make the inevitable split that much more heartbreaking.

Sal and Terry don't work out. They visit her parents, which starts a fight. It turns out Sal is no good at farming, and so there is no point in staying in California. When that dreaded dawn finally comes, and with it the realization that he belongs in New York City, the light of day, of tomorrow, brings the chapter to a close. "Well," he sings, "lackadaddy, I was on the road again."

Before moving to another type of literary device of multilingual writing, it will help our understanding of this essay's thesis to underline Kerouac's importance to multilingual writing. He was after all part of a tradition in America of a mainstream novelist who emerged from the fringes of society, ethnically and culturally.

Greek-American blogger, Stephanie Nikolopoulos, writes in a post titled "Ramblin' Jack" three important points defending Jack's style, so often criticized or overlooked.[17] The first two:

> [One] Kerouac's first language was not English. He was born in Massachusetts to immigrant parents who spoke to him in the French-Canadian dialect Joual. When he went off to school, half the day was taught in French Canadian and the other half in English. It wasn't until he reached high school that he began to feel comfortable speaking in English.

> [Two] While many people critique the American colloquialisms Kerouac uses, it's worth noting that people praise Mark Twain for doing the same thing. Kerouac was working to capture a unique American sound, the language of his times. He used to tape record conversations with his friends and refer to letters they wrote him, just to capture authentic speech patterns and diction.

Kerouac echoed the sonic world he inhabited, while also embodying the great immigrant experience in America, the cool colloquialisms, and this country's unending search for personal identity—understandable for one still so young.

Kerouac drew his inspiration from his environment, but also from literature, as Nikolopoulos states in her third point defending his style:

> [Three] The so-called rambling prose wasn't just echoing true-to-life conversations and speech patterns; it was also referring to the stream-of-consciousness narrative of modernist novels. One of the books he read that influenced his writing style was James Joyce's *Ulysses*, an experimental novel that employed stream of consciousness. In fact, you know that famous quote from *On the Road* about the roman candles? The one that goes: *... but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!"*

Compare this, Kerouac's famous line, to a line from *Ulysses*, taken from one of its most studied chapters, episode thirteen, "Nausicaa":

> …O! then the Roman candle burst and it was like a sigh of O! and everyone cried O! O! in raptures and it gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads and they shed and ah! they were all greeny dewy stars falling with golden, O so lovely, O, soft, sweet, soft!

Kerouac wasn't the only writer influenced by the 20th century's most controversial Irish author, as we shall see in the following section.

2. Interior monologue

As the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century gave literature some of its finest canonical standards for character interiority, the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century saw the literary world establish a new kind of standard: multilingual interiority. One need look no further than to books such as *Omeros* by Derek Walcott, *A House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, and *In Altre Parole* (*In Other Words)* by Jhumpa Lahiri to grasp this change.[18] But before we do these later works justice, we would do well to drive at the source of this development in interiority. And who but the aforementioned man is at the heart of the modernist revolution, James Joyce.

An article from the internet's "academic WD-40," Shmoop, pulls Joyce's focus on language straight out of his novel.[19]

> In "Proteus," Stephen is walking along Sandymount Strand, and as he looks down the beach, he thinks, "These heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here" (3.62). It's a very important quote to *Ulysses*. Namely, language has a *physical* presence in the book: it's the material of Joyce's world. And you thought that the world was made of atoms? Well, in a piece of literature, words are your atoms.

James Joyce was versed in many languages aside from his native English, which he taught as a tutor for the Berlitz Language School, even going so far as to invent new words for his prose which often incorporated ancient Greek, Norwegian, Italian, and medieval Irish.[*] It wouldn't be enough to repeat what scores of scholars have already said about James Joyce, so in the scope of this essay we will simply acknowledge his role as the avant-garde of multilingual interiority, by examining the mind of one of his most famous literary characters.

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[*] Please see his ten "thunder words" from *Finnegan's Wake*. The first in the series is one hundred and one letters long, and compounds several translations of the word "thunder."

A college student could spend a semester taking a course on 20th century literature, philosophy of the mind, gender studies, and intro to Spanish. Or they could take a course dedicated to the forty-six page monologue of Molly Bloom. There, in the last episode of Ulysses, the student reads the ultimate interior monologue: where language and mind become one on the page, until read, when the mind of a character is in the mind of the reader, and all sorts of silly connections can play themselves out. Let us take one theme being played out, the theme of language as a symbol of identity, childhood, and connection to the past.

In her mind, Molly many times ruminates over her childhood in Gibraltar, reminisces over the various characters that she was involved with: lovers, school teachers, generals. It would be natural for her, an Irish school girl in Spain to speak Spanish.[*]

Near the end of the novel, slipping into Spanish conjunctions and Spanish proper names before a full bout of the Spanish language, Molly is aroused by the image of her husband's young intellectual friend, Stephen Dedalus, and his name. He inspires her to amble through memories of her childhood in Spain. Notice how Molly flows between two languages in this section:

> …I wonder its like those names in Gibraltar Delapaz Delagracia they had the devils queer names there father Vilaplana of Santa Maria that gave me the rosary Rosales y OReilly in the Calle las Siete Revueltas and Pisimbo and Mrs Opisso in Governor street O what a name Id go and drown myself in the first river if I had a name like her O my and all the bits of streets Paradise ramp and Bedlam ramp and Rodgers ramp and Crutchetts ramp and the devils gap steps well small blame to me if I am a harumscarum I know I am a bit I declare to God I dont feel a day older than then I wonder could I get my tongue around any of the Spanish como esta usted muy bien gracias y usted

[*] And not just any city in Spain, but one known for marking the border between Europe and Africa, being the port of contention between two world powers, the gate between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean: Gibraltar. This theme of having a foot in each of two doors is found across all of *Ulysses*, which is set in colonized Dublin. One might argue that the whole book explores not just the characters' many languages, but their complex personalities: intellectual and brute, Jewish and Catholic, divine and mundane.

> see I havent forgotten it all I thought I had only for the grammar a noun is the name of any person place or thing pity I never tried to read that novel cantankerous Mrs Rubio lent me by Valera with the questions in it all upside down the two ways I always knew wed do away in the end I can tell him the Spanish and he tell me the Italian and hell see Im not so ignorant what a pity…

Language marks her childhood, is the paint of her nostalgia, and the atoms of her world. She is drawn to Dedalus, not only for his youth, but for his linguistic capacity. It is worth noting also the explicit mention of a language exchange at the tail of this excerpt. She fantasizes having him by way of this specific kind of exchange: she would have them swap sea-faring Mediterranean languages, in addition to an exchange of some other kind.

The Spanish in Molly is rudimentary at best—here we read a greeting, using formal addresses—but it serves the point that Spanish represents her childhood. "…around any of the Spanish," she says—how are you, very well, thank you, and yourself?—"see I havent forgotten." Molly recalls here the various adults in her life, and so it is natural that the Spanish she conjures is formal. Also the "greeting" is an allusion to the potential of "meeting" Stephen, and getting to know him. Of special interest is the line "I dont feel a day older than then," which emphasizes her sense of longing for Stephan, Gibraltar, the sea, her past. None of this could have been achieved in English, which lacks a formal address and would have brushed Molly's linguistic heritage aside, ignoring her characterization, her identity.

Two pages on, nearing her famous affirmative Yes, where Molly describes the Moorish wall, and the Andalusian girls with the flower in their hair, and the mountains, "Yes," James Joyce pens the astonishing conclusion to his novel. If the affirmation to take her husband back is the foreground of this novel's conclusion, then Molly Bloom's longing to return to Spain where they first met, the images she recalls, and two languages that embody her entire soul, necessarily form the background.

This is multilingual writing at its finest, laying the first stone which countless authors throughout the 20th century would build upon.

The Saint Lucian poet, Derek Walcott, took the audacity of *Ulysses* as permission to pen many of his own ambitious works, including *Omeros*.[20] The characters in Walcott's body of work often converse and think in their creole dialects—in addition to thinking, speaking, and describing their surroundings in the island's dominant languages, English and French. For Walcott, the decision to write *Omeros* in predominately English wasn't a given, as it is for most Americans, nor was it a stylistic fancy, as it would be for most polyglots, but a conscious rebellion against the Cyclops of European colonization. In his encounter with the monster, Odysseus escapes certain death by proclaiming himself a "no-man." Joyce found a similar linguistic freedom, borrowing the Greek hero's "no-man" tactic, by writing through his own Jewish and Irish identity struggle under oppressive English rule. Similarly, Walcott wrote in a mulatto of languages, not in any one tongue, but in "no tongue," thereby escaping the torment of a single, despotic language—to voice his own, unique, Caribbean identity. His words sail centuries of linguistic influences, draw from the poetry of Homer, Dante, and even Yeats, form a protean language, shapeshifting, fluid.

The influence of Derek Walcott, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, left a wake still felt in poetry today. Partly because of him, we see how the choice between writing in a colonizing idiom or in a colonized dialect, carries weight, not just literarily, but also politically.

Literature and politics aside, entering a more intimate space, we see the full weight of a personal name given its due in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.[21] In the chapter titled "My Name," metaphors abound to pronounce meaning and character interiority. Her name,

like the name of the heroine of *Nadja*, means hope, but in Spanish: Esperanza. One must read Cisneros's multilingual writing, as well as Walcott's, to fully appreciate what their words are doing, and the insight they grant readers, even if the reader doesn't speak the other language—perhaps it is exactly because a reader doesn't understand the "foreign" language that the reader feels the same chasm between the artist and English.

Nowhere is a linguistic chasm explored more explicitly, in the last five years at least, than in Jhumpa Lahiri's memoir: *In Altre Parole* (*In Other Words)*.[22] It is a testament to Americans writing "foreign" interior monologue, in that the book, which details her relationship with the Italian language, is written almost exclusively in Italian. Lahiri expands the American mainstream memoir genre, and joins a global tradition of writers who write in not their first language, or, in her case, not in their second language either.

Her first language is Bengali, learned from her parents. Her second language is English, the language of her education and writing career in America. Learning Italian, she writes, was simply a "desire." Her desire to write in Italian, out of love.

In her attempt to adopt the Italian language, Lahiri describes herself as creating an artistic mirror, a triangular self-portrait between her three languages, her three identities. True, she isn't a fictional character, but as the protagonist of her memoir, Lahiri gives us the ultimate multilingual interior monologue: in over a hundred pages of prose. The book, by its very nature, is multilingual. She never relinquishes Bengali or English, on or off the page; not to mention the dialogue from her stories remain in their original tongue: kept in English, if spoken in English (one reads English in the original Italian text, on the left-hand side of the dual-language version

of the book[*]) or kept in Italian, if spoken in Italian (one reads Italian on the English side, with English equivalents sometimes in parenthesis).

Lahiri does a lot to defend her decision to study and write in another language, which came not out of necessity—as with Milan Kundera, Joseph Conrad, or Ágota Kristóf—but because of a deep yearning for another culture, the need to write away the void of her "no man," multinational experience. The moral of her story becomes clear in book's afterword, where she explains pure will is enough to immerse yourself in another language, to fall in love with it, to embrace it, and to ask to be embraced by it in turn. The confidence in herself at the end of the book supersedes the insecurity inflicted on her throughout her twenty year relationship with Italian. Thus she wrote a whole book in another language, despite of everything, simply because she wanted to.

That's an American message.

Jhumpa Lahiri, *In Altre Parole*—a marked polyglot story at its finest.

3. Foreign phrase as central motif

In previous examples we looked at how a single word can encapsulate the shift from night to day, as in Kerouac's "mañana"; or how a simple foreign name can be an entry point into a complex character's life, as in the hopes of Nadja and Esperanza—all the power of ice cubes word floating amid deep prosaic narrative. We have also looked at how a second language or creole can serve to illustrate a character's interiority, to make the reader dive a little deeper into what a particular character is feeling—whether alienation, fantasy, or beautiful nostalgia—and in

[*] The dual-language version has Jhumpa Lahiri's original words on the left, and on the right a translation by Ann Goldstein, the gifted translator of Elena Ferrante and Primo Levi.

his or her particular voice. In the case of *In Altre Parole*, we have seen how a third language can even paint the complete picture, even purpose, of a memoir, of a writer. One sees how these elements form the basic tenants of literature: to make the reader see a single word in a new way, to feel what the characters are feeling, or to empathize with the author herself. This is why we thirst for literature.

But there is yet a higher plane, beyond intent and empathy, which few writers reach, but which a certain writer whose influence we still recognize today did reach, and masterfully so, by Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy was concerned with more than symbols and the arrangement of written words. Tolstoy's life work was an attempt to rectify society, to exalt the human spirit.[*] In this section we will draw from one key example of a phrase written in a language foreign to the story's intended audience, yet not foreign to the main characters. We interpret this as having far-reaching implications, for it becomes the story's big idea. What better way to express 19th century Russia, itself manifest of multiple cultures, than through a central motif which ties them all together?

Among his heavy volumes, Tolstoy is best known for his two epics, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. In both works, which are the subjects of over a century of literary study, portray Russian life on virtually all social levels, including the high aristocracy. I mention this because Tolstoy, in his drive for total realism, writes his main characters as having learned and actually speaking multiple languages. Aside from speaking the Tsar's Russian, the main characters are depicted as speaking the French of noblemen, the English of artists, and the German of scientists, as most Europe's aristocrats were versed in many tongues.[†]

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[*] As argued above, in the *Publishing landscape* dialogue of this essay, Tolstoy was concerned with literature's relationship to culture and society.
[†] I am reminded of a joke by the 16th century Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, which goes: "I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and German to my horse."

This essay examines the central motif in a novella by Tolstoy, which Harold Bloom, the Yale professor and author of *The Western Canon*, regards as “the best story in the world”: *Hadji Murat*.[23]

The story is about the last days of its eponymous hero, based on a real 19th century warrior from the region between the Black and Caspian seas, during the Caucasian War, who had defected to the Russians. In the story he symbolizes the promise of a Russo-Caucasian peace, in a story about two cultures colliding. Each half of the conflict figures prominently within the narrative. But the actual story of Murat we read is told and framed by a warrior who crosses from one side to the other, and back.

“Returning home through the fields,” begins our story’s narrator, immediately calling a respect for nature, and the relationship it will bear to the story. The narrator, passing the delightful meadow, “gathered a big bouquet of various flowers and was walking home, when [he] noticed in a ditch, in full bloom, a wonderful crimson thistle of the kind which is known among us as a ‘Tartar’ and is carefully mowed around, and, when accidentally mowed down, is removed from the hay by the mowers, so that it will not prick their hands.” To anyone who has already read the end of the story, in tears, will recall the metaphoric groundwork Tolstoy sets up in this opening passage, and how a crimson thistle reminds our narrator of the hundred-page novella-length narrative about to happen.[*] To the narrator, the thistle represents Murat, the “Tartar,” a thorny wild flower, beautiful, who he struggles to pick up, to “put in the center of the bouquet.” An even deeper look, moreover, suggests that Tolstoy, not the narrator, attempts to put

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[*] *Hadji Murat* was published posthumously, to a wide-reception, one year before the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past* appeared. One would recall how the French novel is set up, when compared with the recently earlier Russian novella. Around page fifty of Proust’s epic, the protagonist’s “crumb of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-flowers” unleashes the next four-thousand pages of prose. Also to ponder: the original English rendering of the French title, “*Remembrance...”* is a reference to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 30, another example of ethnolinguistic cross-pollination between Russia, England, and France.

something else in the center, a phrase which we will examine, as it becomes Tolstoy's message to the larger world.

When the author decided to bridge two linguistically diverse cultures, he must have known to use a mantra that could be understood on all sides.

One basic tenant that Russian Orthodoxy and the Caucasus Muslims shared was the unity of God. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4, we find a most fundamental understanding of monotheism: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one Lord."[*] In Mark 12:29, Christ answers the question of a scribe by stating these words verbatim. In Islam, there is a similar, if not identical statement, considered by believers to be the first of the "Five Pillars of Islam," which is called the Shahada.[†] The Shahada appears about thirty times in the Quran as "La ilaha il Allah": at 37:35 and 47:19, and from then on in slight variations. The phrase translates to "There is no God but God."

The Arabic transliteration into Latin characters is how we find it in Tolstoy.

Before studying the use of this Arabic phrase, it would benefit the student of multilingual writing to note two things the translators Pevear and Volokhonsky do for the collection of Tolstoy's stories, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich & Other Stories*, where we find *Hadji Murat*.

One, the translators include a glossary of "Caucasian Mountaineer Words," a vocabulary list of blended Tartar, Persian, Arabic, Chechen, Nagai, spoken at the time the stories take place, with accents to indicate pronunciation. This proves useful because in *Hadji Murat*, and in some

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[*] This passage in Jewish tradition is understood as the Shema, and acts as the centerpiece of morning and evening prayers, for it encapsulates the unity of Hashem.

[†] Shahada is often translated as "testimony"; from the root "shahida," meaning "to observe, witness, testify" in Arabic: this is important because the frame story of *Hadji Murat* ends, and the real story begins, with the narrator saying, "And I remembered an old story from the Caucasus, part of which I *saw*, part of which I *heard from witnesses*, and part of which I imagined to myself." (Italics mine, to show the narrator's story is itself a testimony.) We are able to wholly accept his testimony, though partly true partly imagined, precisely because it is a work of fiction.

of the other stories in this collection, Tolstoy doesn't just "tell us" the setting is the Caucasus, but actually employs real words to illustrate his narrative. The forty-one word glossary allows the curious reader to learn the words explorers of the Caucasus would have encountered, while not burdening the ferocious reader, adventuring the prose, with cumbersome footnotes, which Pevear and Volokhonsky already do a lot of to detail relevant biography, and important meta-narrative information. Why include forty-one more footnotes, when they are better catalogued in a glossary?

Two, a significant portion of the dialogue in this story is kept in the original French that Tolstoy wrote for the Russian aristocrats, translated in footnotes, while a reader also finds many transliterations of the Caucasus mountaineering expressions in dialogues between Muslim characters. Just a few ways to make prose feel polyglot. For example, when we are first introduced to Murat, in the very first paragraph with him in it, we hear him speak his own language with a fellow Avar.

"Hadji Murat spoke the usual 'Salaam aleikum,' and uncovered his face."

" 'Aleikum salaam,' said the old man, smiling with his toothless mouth, recognizing Hadji Murat…"

Even an elementary reader could tell that a greeting has taken place, with Murat meeting this stranger for the first time, and might assess, if not the literal meaning of the exchange, at least its salutatory importance (being the first words spoken, and repeated in reverse, a common trait across almost all cultures), even to someone completely unfamiliar with Arabic speech.

Here is another example, this time of French, by the supporting lead of the story and his wife, Vorontsov and Marya Vassilievna, who aim to keep their conversation a tinge more private in the presence of Murat, who has shown he knows a bit of Russian. Writers will do well to pay

close attention to how the meaning to the following foreign words is revealed through narrative prose, but not artificially, and how a simple object can be used as the axle on which multiple languages are rotated:

> Hadji Murat was sitting in an armchair holding Bulka, Vorontsov's stepson, on his knee, and, inclining his head, was listening attentively to what the interpreter was saying to him, conveying the words of the laughing Marya Vassilievna. Marya Vassilievna was telling him that if he were to give every kunak whatever thing of his the kunak praised, he would soon be going around like Adam…
>
> When the prince came in, Hadji Murat took Bulka, who was surprised and offended by it, from his knee, and stood up, immediately changing the playful expression on his face to a stern and serious one. He sat down only when Vorontsov sat down. Continuing the conversation, he replied to Marya Vassilievna's words by saying that it was their law, that whatever a kunak likes must be given to the kunak.
>
> "Your son—my kunak," he said in Russian, stroking the curly head of Bulka, who again climbed on his knee.
>
> "He's charming, your brigand," Marya Vassilievna said to her husband in French. "Bulka admired his dagger, and he gave it to him."
>
> Bulka showed his stepfather the dagger.
>
> "*C'est un object de prix*," said Marya Vassilievna.
>
> "*Il faudra trover l'occasion pour lui fair cadeau*," said Vorontsov.[*]
>
> Hadji Murat sat with lowered eyes and stroking the boy's curly head, repeated:
>
> "Dzhigit, dzhigit."
>
> "A beautiful dagger, beautiful," said Vorontsov, half drawing the sharp steel dagger with a groove down the middle. "Thank you."
>
> "Ask him whether I can be of service to him," Vorontsov said to the interpreter.

[*] These actual French phrases are found in the Pevear and Volokhonsky, copy in italics. Their translation into English is given as a footnote: *It's a valuable thing*, said she; *We'll have to find the occasion to make him a gift*, said he. It would be interesting to hear from a reader familiar with the Russian original of this text to tell us whether or not Tolstoy wrote the lines in French lettering, or Cyrillic, in either case italicizing them or not.

> The interpreter translated, and Hadji Murat replied at once that he did not need anything, but asked that he now be taken to a place where he could pray. Vorontsov called a valet and told him to carry out Hadji Murat's wish.

This sample text is so rich that I have had to include it all (and we aren't even to the central motif yet!), ordering multiple language on multiple levels—for a filet mignon of polyglot literature. Its most basic incarnation comes in the "in Russian he said" or "in French she said," a rudimentary style in that the reader gets no flavor for the original speech, yet effectively asks us to imagine the other language while also giving us the direct meaning.[*] A higher level of multilingual writing lies in the language that is out of place with the Russian setting: the French dialogue. These lines are dealt in italics, and given translations at the bottom of the page. The highest form of multilingual writing in this section, and the most difficult to pen, are words like Kunak and Dzhigit, "ice cube words," the definitions of which could be found in the glossary as easily as one finds the solutions to math problems in the back of a textbook; though, nevertheless, are made clear to the attentive reader from within the story, readers willing to show a little work.

Kunak, one gathers from this section, means a sworn friend, or adoptive kin. Murat is depicted as holding the baby boy Bulka on his lap, as if they were uncle and nephew. Additionally the gift to the son of the military captain is symbolic. Vorontsov is the only one who can bring Murat to the Russian fold. The linguistic bond here is not an arbitrary one, as Stunk and White might say. It is essential to the plot, symbolizing the possibility of Murat being adopted by the Russians. The second word, Dzhigit, which means "bold, showy horseman, fine fellow or 'brave,'" could be gathered from this excerpt alone, or from finding it used repeatedly throughout the novella. When someone asks for a favor, or when one compliments a fellow

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[*] What I call the zero-calorie version of multilingual writing.

warrior, they call one another "dzhigit." For the Avar leader to stroke the boy's head and don him with this honorary title is both emotionally important and thematically relevant, since we hear Hadji Murat call other brother Avars by this title. Perhaps, wonders the first time reader, Hadji Murat will join the Russians and save his land and family from destruction. Now, on to the central motif.

Eight pages prior to this scene, before Hadji Murat is introduced to the Russian military elite, in fact on his way there, the reader is shown a hopeful Murat, falling asleep by a campfire: "Looking at the stars, at the Pleiades already risen halfway up the sky, Hadji Murat calculated that it was already long past midnight and that it had long been time for the night's prayer." At this moment we are given the first hint of the unifying symbol, which will appear a total of five times leading up to the story's climactic finale. This scene is hopeful because Murat wishes to join the Russians, hasn't yet, in order to take back his land and rescue his family. It could be argued, not without difficultly, that Tolstoy writes of the stars and of the constellation from Greek Mythology to bind the local warriors and the aggressors under one night sky. In the following excerpt, the slip into Murat's dream, under this shared night sky, is where we read the first instance of the central motif.

Notice how Tolstoy here ties the optimism of Murat to join the Russians with the goal of overcoming his arch enemy Shamil, of cultures overlapping, even connecting dreams with reality, a move characteristic of Tolstoy's style, which in this instance reveals the protagonist's deepest wish to be nothing more than the foreshadow of his eventual demise:

> Hadji Murat had always believed in his luck. When he undertook something, he was firmly convinced beforehand of success—and everything succeeded for him. That had been so, with rare exception, in the whole course of his stormy military life. So he hoped it would be now as well. He imagined himself, with the army Vorontsov would give him, going against Shamil and taking him

> prisoner, and avenging himself, and how the Russian Tsar would reward him, and he again would rule not only over Avaria, but also the whole of Chechnya, which would submit to him. With these thoughts he did not notice how he fell asleep.
>
> He dreamed of how he and his brave men, singing and shouting "Hadji Murat is coming," swoop down on Shamil and take him and his wives, and hear his wives weeping and wailing. He woke up. The song "La ilaha," and the shouts of "Hadji Murat is coming," and the weeping of Shamil's wives—these were the howling, weeping, and laughter of the jackals, which woke him up.

This excerpt presents the reader with the first instance of the central motif, "La ilaha il Allah." Tolstoy, though best known for his density, and less known for the purpose of his density, often introduced the first hints of his central themes as "needles in the hay stack" of seemingly extraneous information (or thistles in a bouquet?). The needle here is the first two words of the Shahada, which Pevear and Volokhonsky tag with an endnote: "The phrase *La ilaha il Allah* ("There is no god but Allah"), which states the most central belief of Islam, is sung in the call to prayer five times a day and may also be used as a battle cry." Thankfully the translators have done the work of calling attention to the first instance of this important phrase planted in an otherwise dense passage about a night sky, a wishful dream, and the rude awakening of its protagonist. These details seem superfluous, but as any admirer of Tolstoy's will attest, nothing in Tolstoy is gratuitous. And as we shall see, the half-sung "La ilaha" points the way to the story's finale.

The second instance of the Shahada actually comes sixty pages later, only here it is foregrounded, and spoken fully. "Soon after Hadji Murat came over to the Russians," begins chapter nineteen, Shamil comes home from a battle against the Christian invaders, or Russian nationalist depending on the interpretation. There seems to be a confusion as to who was the winner of the battle. Each side claims to have routed the other. Already Tolstoy illustrates the rift between these different worlds, which is symbolized in the character Shamil, the story's lead

antagonist. Shamil is a foil to Murat, and the force that aims to break off the Caucasian peoples from Russian imperialism, only not through diplomacy as Murat wants it, but through violence. While Murat, the story's titular character, hopes to enter into an alliance with the Russians, Shamil embodies the belief that the two worlds are irreconcilable. To boot, Shamil holds Murat's family hostage.

> It was midday when Shamil, surrounded by the party of murids, caracoling around him, firing off their rifles and pistols, and ceaselessly singing "La ilaha il Allah," rode up to his place of residence.

We get a sense of what the translators had noted in the phrase's first instance: a religious chant, a battle cry, a victory yell (or rebel yell).

A page later, we read the third instance of the Shahada, which is actually the same victory cry for Shamil's return, but heard from another point of view: Murat's prisoner son, brooding at the bottom of a hole in the ground.

> [Murat's son] only heard the singing and shooting from his dark, stinking hole, and suffered as only young people full of life suffer deprived of freedom. Sitting in the stinking hole and seeing all the same unfortunate, dirty, exhausted people imprisoned with him, for the most part hating each other, he was passionately envious of those who, enjoying air, light, freedom, were now caracoling on spirited horses around the ruler, shooting and singing as one: "La ilaha il Allah."

Why this passage is so heartbreaking is because Tolstoy chose to depict the same "caracoling" of victory, but from two opposite perspectives: the people above ground, who are portrayed as "a party," and the stinking people below, who hate each other. This dichotomy serves to reinforce the unity of this phrase. "There is no god but God" goes for both upper and lower levels of society, for both winners and losers, it is a chant that reverberates throughout this scene, throughout this narrative moving forward on multiple levels. Even if the casual reader reached this far into the story without reading the endnote (with the translation of the chant by Pevear and Volokhonsky), he would have noticed the chant was ubiquitous, something to be sung en masse,

or heard individually—even if some fail to enjoy the glory, as is the case of Murat's son, and later Murat himself—the chant is everywhere.

A few chapters on, nearing the story's end, Hadji Murat grows impatient with the Russian nobility to accept his conditions for joining them and reconciling the two factions of the Caucasus: the Christian imperialists, and the Muslim locals. Tolstoy up until now has done a lot of work to show us that the highest levels of government are too concerned with their petty vices, or too steeped in bureaucratic obligations to worry about a defected Avar nomad. By chapter twenty-three, after deep introspection, Murat realizes he must betray the Russians, for they are taking too long. He escapes them, in an attempt to rescue his family from Shamil. Luckily, he is not alone. He commands his comrades to saddle up and take flight.

> Before daybreak Hadji Murat went out to the hall again to fetch water for his ablutions. In the hall the pre-dawn trilling of the nightingales could be heard, still louder and more rapid than during the night. In the nukers' room could be heard the measured hiss and whistle of steel against stone as daggers were sharpened.[*] Hadji Murat dipped some water from the tub and had already gone back to his door when he heard in the murid's room, besides the sound of sharpening, also the high, thin voice of [his comrade] singing a song he knew. He stopped and began to listen.

(We pause here to mention a unique phenomenon for readers of polyglot literature: after receiving a foreign phrase as many times as "La ilaha" has appeared until now, the reader will have decided whether the phrase means anything to him, or not worth looking up at all; in either case, with the soon to appear fourth iteration of "La ilaha," the reader cannot deny that the phrase at least matters to the story. Also, this moment foreshadows the fifth and final appearance.)

> The song told of how the dzhigit Hamzat and his brave lads stole a herd of white horses from the Russian side. How the Russian prince then overtook him beyond the Terek and surrounded him with

[*] Notice the buildup of sonic elements before the issue of the Shahada. A keen practitioner of the written word will do well to remember language is an auditory phenomenon, as Tolstoy here clearly remembers, arming his reader to receive the central motif by orchestrating the sonic world in which a soloist is about to sing.

> his army big as a forest. Then it sang of how Hamzat slaughtered all the horses and hid with his brave lads behind the bloody mound of dead horses and fought as long as there were bullets in their guns and daggers at their belts and blood in their veins. But before he died, Hamzat saw birds in the sky and shouted to them: "You birds of the air, fly to our homes, tell our sisters and mothers and the white-skinned maidens that we all died for the ghazavat. Tell them that our bodies will not lie in graves, but ravenous wolves will rend them and gnat our bones, and black ravens will peck out our eyes.
>
> With these words the song ended, and to these last words, sung to a mournful tune, was joined the cheerful voice of the merry Khan Mahoma, who cried out at the very end of the song, "La ilaha il Allah"—and gave a piercing shriek. Then everything became still, and again only the trilling and whistling of the nightingales in the garden could be heard and from behind the door the measured hiss and occasional whistle of steel rapidly sliding over stone.

The sonic elements present here form a triangle. On one end we hear nature, birds. On the other end, the steely force of human beings. At the top of the triangle is the chant, "La ilaha il Allah," the northern angle pointing to a unified, and unifying God.

Later on, the last scene: "Sabers out, lads!" cries out one of Murat's companions, "snatching out his own," as the hundred shrieking voices of men rush to meet Murat and his men (Spoiler Alert), who are camped out for the final showdown. In the following excerpt we encounter the central motif in full-relief, presented a fifth time to show the relationship it bears to the narrator's frame story (of the "Tartar" thistle), and to show how Tolstoy magnified this battle cry through dramatic language.

> The militiamen ran into the bushes, but from behind the mound several shots cracked out one after the other. Three men fell, and the attackers stopped and also started firing from the edge of the bushes. They fired and at the same time gradually approached the mound, running from bush to bush. Some managed to make it, some fell under the bullets of Hadji Murat and his men. Hadji Murat never missed, and Gamzalo also rarely wasted a shot and shrieked joyfully each time he saw

> his bullet hit home. Kurban was sitting on the edge of the ditch, singing "La ilaha il Allah" and firing unhurriedly, but rarely hitting anything.

You can imagine what happens to Murat. Before ending the story, the narrator comments, "The nightingales, who had fallen silent during the shooting, started trilling, first one close by and then others further off."

Even if a reader doesn't bother with the endnotes, because of the phrase's repetition, and the sonic and dramatic language that accompanies it, the phrase "La ilaha il Allah" emerges as the story's central motif. Tolstoy, with *Hadji Murat*, wanted to bridge cultures. He did it with a phrase that calls for unity. He did it with a foreign language, and, in my opinion, succeeded.

4. Final notes, extra credit and cautionary tales

Below are some final notes on polyglot literature, some extra credit, and a cautionary tale.

Other works besides the ones mentioned above have struck multilingual chords, but few with as much vehemence and formality as is called for today. The above examples were selected from novels of innovation and influence on world literature. Of course it helps to honor a few more multilingual writers from the last fifty years that exemplify a polyglot protagonist, and his or her struggle for language perfection, wherein both reader and writer are satisfied. The following are listed in passing, collected here because somewhere in the narrative the issue of multilingualism is addressed.

In her debut novel, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, Sigrid Nunez opens with an explicit treaties on language.[24]

> The first time I ever heard my father speak Chinese was at Coney Island. I don't remember how old I was then, but I must have been very young. This was in the early days, when we still went on

> family outings. We were walking along the boardwalk when we ran into the four Chinese men. My mother told me the story often, as if she thought we'd forgotten. "You kids didn't know them and neither did I. They were friends of your father's, from Chinatown. You'd never heard Chinese before. You didn't know what was up. You stood there with your mouths hanging open—I had to laugh. "Why are they singing? Why is Daddy singing?"

At once we notice the connection between speech and music, and other languages. Though Nunez doesn't mostly write in other languages, neither does she write only in English. Her writing aims at writing itself. Her language aims at language herself. This provides a special vantage.

A Feather… attempts to grapple and understand the coming of age of an American of Chinese and German descent. The protagonist grows up to become an English language teacher, in one of the great hodgepodges of the world: New York. The next two parts of the book deal respectively with each aspect of her upbringing. There is a third section which titles the whole book, followed by a romance story titled "Immigrant Love."

In the end the narrator is flung into a hot and fiery affair with one of her students, a Russian. His own struggle to communicate himself is foregrounded, while the previous sections about the narrator's own language struggles are now in the background of our imaginations. In the end the relationship fails.

A word of caution to multilinguals: take note of this story. Consider your own upbringings, your own biases, when setting forth to write in multiple languages. Along the way you will meet other polyglots, not all friendly, not all against you. The main lesson this book offers, among from its memorable lines, is to be honest: "In more than one language the words for love and suffering are the same," Nunez writes, "and I have flung myself from cliffs, I have

hurled myself at men's hearts like javelins." Know thyself—another rule more important than "Rule number one."

A book praised for its celebration of life, but less acknowledged for its multilingual writing, is *Zorba the Greek*,[25] particularly chapter three, where the hostess Madame Hortense is introduced. She is a French woman living on Crete, running a hotel. When the two main characters meet her, they find out that she has hosted Englishmen, Frenchmen, Russians, and Italians—"all the world powers," the narrator comments—and more than just "hosted" them in her hotel. Zorba's relationship with her begins by beguiling her fancies for her youth, speaking to her of her lost multicultural loves. This encounter is of note because we find that Madame has a terrible accent in Greek, which Kazantzakis (by virtue of the English translator, Peter Bien) shows through unusual spelling and unorthodox syntax closer related to French. A study of this chapter would repay the scholar, as a study of multilingual prose alone. But the caution here is how on the whole her voice is treated, what one risks when writing multilingually: one may confuse the reader. Instead of a melting pot of culture, or a salad of languages, a reader might find himself at the mercy of an inexperienced writer, staring between two sheets of linguistic hogwash, riddled in arbitrary language, and left as frustrated as an unsatisfied widow. Hortense, despite having been exposed to multiple cultures, doesn't symbolize the ideal of this essay's thesis. She speaks many languages, yet her capacity is lacking.

But, notwithstanding her jumble of languages and disturbed dialogue, Madame Hortense is a venerable character, full of love, who housed many men, and many cultures, and hosted them all under one roof. It would be to the polyglot's benefit to learn from Hortense's love for culture, from Zorba's exuberant masquerading as these other nationals, without employing either's sloppiness. Or not. The choice is yours.

The essays by Elif Batuman, in her book *The Possessed*,[26] in part narrate her travels through Samarkand, framed by her impulse to learn the Uzbek language. She details her exposure to the country's national poets, and her attempts to connect her Turkish past with her affinity for Russian novelists. She finds Uzbekistan is the linguistic node where her two loves meet. Any scenes where she examines Uzbek would pay the reader, for their wit, insight, and learning a word or two of Uzbek. Batuman equips herself to write fine multilingual prose, entertains and educates us, but who also warns of the danger of over-romanticizing other languages. Near the end of her summer in Uzbekistan she recounts a World Cup soccer match between Brazil and Turkey. She has been studying the language and national literature of the people in the small village she lives in. She is Turkish. It strikes her as sad when she finds out no one cheers for Turkey with her. The locals rather cheer the Brazilians, people who have no relationship to them, but who play better soccer. Batuman here laments that she "became aware of a deep flaw in [her] understanding of the world and human knowledge."

> I had previously thought of knowledge as a network of connections that somehow preserved and safeguarded the memory of what they were connecting. But of course it was only people who remembered things; words and ideas themselves had no memory. The Uzbek language truly was related to both Turkish and Russian, by either genetic origin or secondary contact…but that didn't make it a reconciliation between the two. When you studied Uzbek, you weren't learning a history or a story; all you were learning was a collection of words. And the larger implication was that no geographic location, no foreign language, no preexisting entity at all would ever reconcile "who" you were with "what" you were, or where you came from with what you liked.

This is indeed a sad passage, considering earlier in her life she had seen her love for the Russian language as real and deep, that the sacrifice of diving deeper into her own heritage was worth it, because she was learning about something she loved, learning "what" she was. One could read this passage by Batuman and think there is no point in learning another language; or read this

passage as reinforcing Batuman’s love of language: the way a love becomes stronger when it survives a heartbreak.

B. MUSIC

1. Obliterating gender stereotypes: the bridge in Beyoncé's "Partition"[27]

In 2013 the artist, mother, feminist, and performer Beyoncé Knowles dropped her self-titled visual album of fourteen tracks and music videos. Track six, which comprises two songs "Yoncé" and "Partition," is the track we will examine in this essay. Producers credited are Timberland, Jerome Harmon, Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé Knowles, Key Mane, Mike Dean, and BOOTS.

Some may wonder why an essay whose aim is to study and promote multilingual prose would venture into other genres of art. I believe that the writers of today's pop music have something valuable to offer artists of other mediums. As the self-titled album clearly proves, it was an effort that brought together writers and singers, dancers and choreographers, cinematographers and directors, musicians and composers, painters and set designers, and so many more. One need only read the credits at the bottom of each of her videos on YouTube, or better yet, purchase her visual album and peruse the inner jacket to realize how far her concept dipped into other mediums. What Beyoncé offers artists outside of her sphere of creation is her sphere of influence. More than what she offers, it is what she symbolizes—feminism to some, maternity to others, liberation, and creative powerhouse to most. In regards to the thesis of this essay—which doesn't so much bow down to this diva, as hopes to sample some of her nerve—I will highlight an overlooked twenty-second bridge in an album spanning over sixty-six minutes, re-contextualize it, analyze what it does, and say a word or two about how it works as a prime example of multilingual writing.

Accompanying the visual and the auditory project, Beyoncé released a mini art feature comprised of nine parts that glimpses into its making.[28] Part four is called "Liberation" and shows the artist herself explaining the history of the album, how she arranged for the collaborators to join her in her studio, details personal background (she had just given birth, recording the tracks while still breastfeeding), and most importantly for this analysis: Beyoncé explains how "Partition" was written—"I'm in the studio, and I hear this beat, and it's this bassline[*]…I didn't have a pen and paper, I got to the mic, and I'm like, 'hit record.' "

The result of her improvisation is a seven-line opening verse, about a fantasy of being with her husband in a limousine. The partition sung about in the track separates the driver from the couple, who about to enter a messy and delirious union.

As the singer herself attests to in the mini art feature, this song was her way of showing the world a woman could recover her body after a pregnancy, that no pressure should repress one's super power (one's sexuality), voiced here in a speedy track about indulging in a backseat rodeo. One need only review the lyrics to understand what Beyoncé's intentions are. In the pre-hook, Beyoncé calls her man "Daddy, Daddy," later "Baby, Baby": thereby complicating the assumption about how feminists behave in the bedroom, or in this case a limo. She can be submissive and dominant.

The track would have been radio-ready without the bridge at minute 4:19. But for some reason the inclusion of this twenty-second French bridge takes the track from pop song, to artistic statement. It could be said that Beyoncé has southern/creole roots, influencing her

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[*] The "bassline" is a Plagal Cadence, which is composed of a subdominant chord followed by the tonic chord: a consonant shift; this bit of music theory is relevant to the overt implications made by the lyrics of the song—role switching—and also by the inclusion of a French bridge between two English hook verses—as English and French are so related, sharing many sounds and words, that they seem to be consonant languages. I argue that this plagal cadence is the symbol of what Beyoncé accomplishes with her multilingual lyrics, not to mention a sick beat to groove to.

decision to add French, but more poignant to this song is in the connotation France has in America: of democracy, liberty, sexual freedom.*

The bridge in its original form: †

> Est-ce que tu aimes le sexe?
>
> Le sexe, je veux dire: l'activité physique, le coït. Tu aimes ça?
>
> Tu ne t'intéresses pas au sexe?
>
> Les hommes pensent que les féministes détestent le sexe mais c'est une activité très stimulante et naturelle que les femmes adorent

And here, a translation:

> Do you like sex?
>
> Sex, I mean: physical activity, coitus. You like it?
>
> Are you not interested in sex?
>
> Men think that feminists hate sex but it's an exciting and natural activity that women love.

A Slate article[29] at the time of the album's release made the connection with the French lyric and the scene in *The Big Lebowski* where the Dude first meets feminist and artist Maud Lebowski. This only doubles the implication made by Beyoncé's artistic choice to include French into her album. Not only is she able to express her sexuality, which she does well in English, but she does it with a French that adds a flavor only the French can offer. Compounded this with the possibility that this track drew from a deadpan feminist in a Coen Brothers film, and the listener snaps her fingers to a danceable, sick beat with a message.

These layers are made possible by the artist's choice to add a new language, a new dimension, to her track—again, composed of two tracks, joined by an interlude are 1:48-2:02, as

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* There's a quote I can't seem to remember the origin of, but goes something like: "No one invented sex, but the French definitely refined it."

† The French is sung by one of the dancers who went on tour with Beyoncé at the time of the album, Hajiba Fahmy, a dancer and choreographer in her own right, whose own works explore gender roles.

a sort of partition between two songs, where a reporter asks the diva, "Are you happy to be in Paris?" which only in repeated listens does a listener catch, and come to prefigure the bridge.

2. Gibberish German: parsing the gobbledygook in Lady Gaga's track "Scheiße"[30]

The opening line to Lady Gaga's "Scheiße" sets the tone for her track, which in colloquial German means "crap."

"I don't speak German, but I can if you like, ow!"

The track then drops into its chorus, twelve lines of German-sounding gibberish. To the American listener, these lines may well sound like German, hearing words like "Ich," "fräulein," and "monstère" (which isn't actual German, or any language, but oddly sounds French?). "I wish I knew what she were saying!" the American listener exclaims, feeling estranged by an artist of their own. "Why doesn't she sing in English?"

The truth is Lady Gaga does something much more subversive than simply alienate her native audience. The careful listener keeps the first line of the track in mind and bears throughout its 3:46 minutes a unique message, not just the literal one in from the upcoming verses, but a message just the same.

After the chorus, the first verse speaks of taking a man out, of saying "whatever" he would like to hear, of putting on a show for him.

"Scheiße, scheiße be mine / Scheiße, be mine," Gaga sings, seeming to own the scheiße that surrounds her, the crap she must endure to please a man. The gibberish, then, is understandably a show, a farce, despite its lyrical unintelligibility.

The second verse raises the same theme, but to another level, with a bit of translation on the artist's part: "Love is objectified by what men say is right / scheiße, scheiße be mine / bullshit, be mine." Lady Gaga, through her German-avatar, replies to her harshest critics, by absorbing the hate she feels as a female who only wants to live a life free of prejudice, a life free of "bullshit."

We could extrapolate more meaning from the twelve-line babble repeated halfway through the song, but before needing to, Lady Gaga lets the listener know she doesn't need defending, saying so herself in the pre-chorus.

"When I'm on a mission / I rebuke my condition / If you're a strong female / You don't need permission." And then enters the chorus, again.

Lady Gaga reported in an interview that when she speaks about herself, she feels people (particularly males)[*] don't take her seriously, that they only hear her blabbering. This sentiment of being ignored was the inspiration for "Scheiße." She wanted listeners to dance, certainly, but also to empathize with the confusion she meets with when expressing her individuality. Where the chorus makes us feel what the artist feels—isolation—the literal message of the verses and the pre-chorus appeal to the English-listeners' emotional intelligence through her direct, English lyricism.

Both literal and emotional, this mind-body charm could only have been achieved through multilingual writing. The fact that the chorus is gibberish, not real German, doesn't detract from the feeling the listener is made to feel; in fact it only underscores it, precisely because the words are meaningless. What counts is the overall effect: the pain of misunderstanding, laid over a hard

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[*] The only shame about this track is that Lady Gaga seems to pin all her artistic miscommunication on male-kind. It would appear from this song alone that females do not bullshit Lady Gaga, nor misunderstand her. Do they not? Do I here?

German dance beat, woven with a poetic statement in English: gibberish is crap, and not meeting an artist halfway to understand her is, too, pure scheiße.

Of note, on using foreign-sounding gobbledygook in music, please see Adriano Celentano's Prisencólinensináinciúsol, recorded in 1972: an Italian's impression of English gibberish, to the tune of rock and roll.[31] This is another example of alienating the listener on purpose, with purpose. Babbling lyrics can be a powerful device when used right, not just for the target audience (who on first play wouldn't know the lyrics are gibberish), but also to the foreign listener (who can only confess the lines have no meaning), like in Prisencólinensináinciúsol: a song by an Italian, for Italians, which satirizes the English language, and American culture.

3. Rhyming in place: internal and external rhymes employed by Mano Chau in "Me Gustas Tú"[32]

So far we have looked at two American artists who draw from their multicultural background to make multilingual music. Were we to make a list of American musicians who write in multiple languages, we would list the indispensable Pit Bull, Kevin Johansen, Jennifer Lopez, Demi Lovato, and even Kendrick Lamar (on Schoolboy Q's track "Collard Greens") to just name a few.[33] For Americans accustomed to listening to English-centric songs, these examples would seem to be the exception to an airwave dominated by monolinguists. But it must be said that in countries around the world, the incorporation of English (that is, to them, "foreign") words in their music has a long standing tradition, especially when we consider how far the sphere of American pop music has spread.

Following this tradition—and not only the tradition in music, but the socio-political migration of cultures—we turn to Mano Chau. He is one of the few artists to encapsulate the raw power of multiculturalism to sing in many languages, at least eight, and some made up ones.[34]

We will look at one of his most renown songs—from his second solo album, *Próxima Estación: Esperanza*—track six: "Me Gustas Tú."

The song begins with an invocation, a question to one's own heart, or to one's love—depending on your interpretation—which is then repeated in the chorus.

"¿Qué horas son, mi corazón?"

The song then plays a sample of newscasters announcing various times in various cities of Latin America, seemingly to layer a sense of disorientation, but layer a sense of multiculturalism. Overall, the song is a hypnosis: each line is divided into two parts, swinging back and forth. Each line ends with the words of the track title, "me gustas tú," while they begin by addressing a different love for different things: planes, the air, mornings, dreaming, rain, mountains, cinnamon, cities, and even marijuana. A theme emerges, of nature, of the listener, of the many manifestations of a poet's love. This multifaceted love makes sense when we remember this song is sung in many languages. The chorus in its original:

¿Qué voy a hacer? Je ne sais pas

¿Qué voy a hacer? Je ne sais plus

¿Qué voy a hacer? Je suis perdu

¿Qué horas son, mi corazón?

From only seeing the lines, even without the meaning, we get a sense of the doubling that Manu Chao does in verses is also found in these choral lines (here, pairing a Spanish question, with a French response). The fact that there is no French answer to the Spanish question asked by the fourth line (remember, also the song's opening question) could mean almost anything.

Seemingly, it points to the inconclusive nature of man's search for himself. The singer tries to find his own heart, or love, by traveling, by speaking multiple languages, by loving as many things as possible, all beautiful, even psychedelic. The swing of both the verses and the chorus is a symbol of being split, lost from one's self, of always swinging, which the multilingual lyrics accentuate beyond the conceptual realm into the verbal sphere of one person's emotion. The translation of the chorus:

> What will I do? I do not know.
>
> What will I do? I don't know anymore.
>
> What will I do? I am lost.
>
> What time is it, my heart?[*]

Of course, an English listener can read at the translation and cerebrally intuit the message; but for her to feel the beauty in Manu Chao's poetry, she must listen to the track, and pick up the internal and external rhymes (even if not quite understanding the words), because this way she can string together the sonic sentiment so prominent in this song.

At the end of the song, the multilingual approach leads to multiple understandings of itself. Any practitioner of multilingual writing will do well to study the form and style of Manu Chao, a pioneer in the realm of world music, a hard working musician, socially-conscious and politically charged, but with a soft side, still looking for himself, as are all polyglots.

4. Globalization, controversy and soccer: Shakira's "Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)" during the 2010 FIFA World Cup[35]

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[*] Note this is the literal translation of "mi corazón," which could alternatively be read as "my love." This particular multiple interpretation is only achievable in Spanish. In the second half of the original recording a woman comes and sings the chorus after Manu Chao does, suggesting that the question really is a call to another person, this female partner, though the fact that she sings it could also signal that the question is universal, applicable to anyone willing to sing along. It is up for debate, a great quality of any work of art.

Eleven albums since 1991, most of which were recorded twice, in Spanish and English, for release in demographically distinct markets, including the best-selling single of the 2000s—"Hips Don't Lie"[36]—Shakira is one of the most unique artists in her class.

No wonder FIFA asked her to compose the official song for the 2010 World Cup in Africa. She represents multiculturalism like few artists do, is adored all over the globe, and comes from a soccer-obsessed country herself. But to many, especially to native South Africans, who were hosting the games, the choice came as a disappointment. Wouldn't it have been better for an African band to sing the glory of this monumental occasion, the first time the games were held on the continent? Nevertheless, the soccer association stuck to their decision.

"Waka Waka" is sung by Shakira, and features the South African band Freshlyground. The lyrics encourage one to aim for her goals like a soldier does on the battlefield, no matter the odds. Interestingly enough, and to the point of our thesis, the chorus is a sample from "Zamina mina (Zangaléwa)," a 1986 hit song by the Cameroonian band Golden Sounds.[37] The sampled song became so famous that the band changed their name to Zangalewa, following the track's success mid-eighties. The original, sampled song mixes many languages: Douala, French, Patois, and the Pidgin English of some parts of West Africa. The words "Zamina, mina" translate to "come, come," whereas the word "Zangaléwa" is a question, which in the context of the 1986 song asks, "Who brought you to the army?" but in a more general sense really asks, "Where are you from?" It is in this latter sense that the phrase appears in FIFA song.

Turning to Shakira's lyrics, below is the multilingual chorus, for the 2010 games:

Zamina mina, eh eh

Waka waka, eh eh

> Zamina mina zangalewa
>
> This time for Africa

The chorus beckons the listener (the soccer star, the soldier) to “come, come,” to answer “Where are you from?” because this is Africa, and it is time to play some world-class fútbol.

Revisiting the controversy, one might argue that the FIFA’s choice to have a non-African sing the 2010 anthem shifted the spot light away from Africa. But a more formal analysis of her track, and her global trajectory as an artist yields a richer history than uninformed critics will have it be, a history worthy of the world cup and of Africa, of their union. Not only that, but the song stands as a pillar of multilingual writing. It looks from within its multilingual heart (the origins of the 1986 song), and projects itself outward to a world-wide audience, one yearning for a universal message.

C. FILM

1. Cold War, neorealism and the boot: English in 1960's Italy

In this section I do not intend to give movie reviews or to pen cinematic critique. I would like to merely highlight the use of multilingual elements in a handful of films that have been proven, by more qualified critics, to be influential and innovative. This dual quality—influence and innovation—informs the polyglot movement: to provoke change in the world, and to invoke new ways of thinking for oneself. And with that introduction, let us go back in time to the 1960s, to a glamorous Europe, after the fall of fascism, but with the threat of another internal revolution.

We turn to Federico Fellini's 1960, Palm d'or winning *La Dolce Vita.*[38] The film is one of the most highly acclaimed movies of all time, and so I will not spend time talking about Marcello's amble through decadent Rome, or his failing relationship to his overly sentimental fiancé, or the debauchery of love with Anouk Aimee, or even the suicide of his best friend Steiner, which marks the emotional nadir of the film. What I will talk about is the symbolism of Anita Ekberg's character, the blonde and buxom Sylvia: an American starlet visiting the set of her new film (a film within a film) also set in Rome.

Let us consider Italy in the 1950s and 60s. War torn, hungry, but eternal. Neorealist films do a fantastic job of portraying that in the raw. But what Fellini did was a bit different. He was tuned to the American invasion, so to speak, of the time. The influx of NATO money and American pop cultural all spellbound a people looking for answers outside of itself. Surely the 1970s, with the perpetual upheavals and union strikes, were the effects of a nation hoping to

rebuild itself on external ideas. But before 1970s, Fellini's job as an artist was to capture the spirit of the age, and to more than a few critics he does, and does so perfectly.

If Fellini's intention was to merely hint at how America was influencing Italy, he could have cast the equally talented Sofia Loren for the role of Sylvia. An Italian woman would have added a direct and intelligible dimension to the film. The general Italian audience would have understood her lines. She could have been American, one might argue, "theoretically"; that is, an Italian with Italian lines, speaking the language the general audience would have understood. In that case, *La Dolce Vita* would have been even more Italian! (If that were possible). But would the film have been as honest to the political and social milieu of 1960 Rome? Would the film have maintained the specific air of American stardom, with all of Ekberg's quintessentially Hollywood bedazzle, through an Italian actress? This essay claims, No. *La Dolce Vita* only became *La Dolce Vita*, when it incorporated that extra element of multilingual writing into the script, and filmed those immortal scenes full of Americans at the night club, and the last house party.

It only takes one example, one cinematic sequence, to illustrate this point. What would La Dolce Vita be without the Fontana d'Trevi? The scene shows Sylvia fanciful and fluffy, with the white baby kitten on her head, aiming at anything she wants, and going. What a metaphor for the American in Europe. What about poor Marcello? He is left star-struck by Sylvia, and at the mercy of her every whim. They can barely communicate; though it seems Marcello knows a bit of English ("Sylvia, wait in my car," he says), Sylvia seems so oblivious to the culture, she might as well have been in Constantinople. She speaks only in English, until she doesn't speak at all, and by then she is waist deep in water, looking up, waiting for a kiss perhaps. "Si, Sylvia," Marcello says to himself, in Italian. "We are all making a mistake" (in Italian). He enters the

water, goes to her, but they never make contact. They never connect. Critics call it “the greatest non-kiss in the history of cinema”[39]. I call it an example of two people who never connect because of the chasm separating them—language—one character symbolizing the eternal city in woe, while the other acts as a free-spirited star from across the pond.

Of equal note is another film released one year later, in 1961, titled *La Notte*, by Italian auteur Michelangelo Antonioni.[40] The fact that the film came a year later, and features the same Marcello Mastroianni as the lead actor, begs for this film to be paired with *La Dolce Vita*, not to mention there is a pivotal scene which features multilingualism.

Pontano (Marcello Mastroianni’s new role) is a novelist disillusioned with his success, and the ennui of the literary elite. He is married to Lidia (Jeanne Moreau). While the first third of the film shows them together, the second third has them separated. During his latest book launch, the wife abandons her husband (they had been fighting all morning), and wanders the city on her own. Marcello doesn’t notice until she has gone too far off. His first instinct, leaving the book launch and searching for her, is to go check their apartment in another neighborhood.

When he walks into his apartment, frazzled and desperate to find his wife—lingering here to emphasis the emotional aspect of this moment, because the camera asks for it—Pontano walks in to find an empty apartment, but something odd is happening. A record player seems to be playing something. We hear English and Italian. As the husband approaches, he finds his wife is not home, but has left a “Learn English” record on, with an American woman reading words in English, and an Italian man repeating the word in his language.

Many metaphors can be made, parallels to the one of Sylvia and American encroachment. Perhaps the clearest metaphor would connect the disillusionment of an Italian intellectual (played by Marcello, the symbol of Italian cultural production) and the loss of his wife (who is a

ferocious reader of novels; that is, Lidia symbolizes the reception of Italian culture). Separated they are lost. One might be angry at the other, the other cheating on the one, but their reconciliation at the end of *La Notte*, at the golf course next to the party house, however edgy, could be taken as the hard-won and not-entirely innocent coming together of Italian authorship with Italian readership: the unification of a culture.

2. For a relaxing time: make it Sofia Coppola's 2003 *Lost in Translation*[41]

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of multilingualism in art of the last 15 years is Sofia Coppola's film about a middle age Bill Murray and a young Scarlet Johansson, their aimless wander through Tokyo, and their random rendezvous. Both are Americans lost in a world completely foreign to their own, but that is precisely what unites two people as disparate as Murray and Johansson. In LA they might never have bat an eye to one another. But in Tokyo, they are connected by one very, very important thing: the ability to understand one another. And so the movie progresses along those lines: Murray imparts wisdom and humor, while Johansson takes Murray out of his middle-aged misery—a fine deal, and one that billows into potential amorous atmospheres, but ultimately never does, marking the film as realistic, relevant, and, to add a third thing, powerful.

It should be said that in this film, there is a scene where the two actually meet up over some sake to watch the Fontana d'Trevi scene in a hotel room. Sofia Coppola stated in an interview that Fellini had had a big impact on her: "I saw that movie on TV when I was in Japan. It's not plot-driven, it's about them wandering around. And there was something with the Japanese subtitles and them speaking Italian—it had an enchanting quality."[42]

The similarities between the two works are uncanny. But aside from the plotless-ness, the films share that indelible quality of being lost in a different culture, a different language. What connects the films is the thematic heart in each of these stories: movies bound not by plot, but by culture. Italian Culture is what holds the story together in *La Dolce Vita*, as Japanese Culture is the glues in *Lost in Translation*. How the characters maneuver through their irrespective worlds, their foreign languages, is a telling one.

For an illustration, one need only sample *Lost in Translation*'s Suntory commercial shoot, wherein Bill Murray is asked to perform seemingly impossible tasks by an unruly photographer, yet the interpreter's translation comes out short and snippy and formal. A reading of the transcript in both languages reveals the deeper humor of this scene, which is already funny even if you don't know Japanese.[43]

Glory! to the work of multilingual art that can craft something the general audience won't "get" linguistically, yet is able to understand nonetheless (the humor, or l'essence, or what Walter Benjamin called, the intentio). Transmitting intention—there's another higher virtue.

IV. CONCLUSION (SOLILOQUY)

Where do we go from here? Who is to blame for the past? Want a penny?

For those of you just tuning in, it is here I would like to thank my professors, particularly Sigrid Nunez and Val Vinokur, who have contributed to my learning in unmeasurable ways, and who to me are both gurus of this our craft. Additionally, professor Susan Bell for her lessons on editing, and yoga; Melissa Monroe for sharing her passion of literature and a many timeless poem about the sea; James Lasdun for his wit, and literary insights; and John Reed and director Luis Jaramillo for being with us as patient guides and seasoned storytellers. I especially thank all my comrades in arms, in pens and pencils, you who read and nurture fellow scriveners. My time at the New School, let it be said, has shaped me into who I am. The books I read, the hypocrisy I suffered, the arrogance I became sick with, were all contracted at my university, in New York City, the home of more than one culture. A colleague of mine mentioned in a workshop the other day that she stuck out like a sore thumb back in her hometown in the middle belly of this beautiful country. But in New York she felt part of a group; she "dissolved" here in New York. If this essay has any aim, it is to dissolve into the zeitgeist of this world. This work could only have been drafted today, building off "what" I am, to state "who" I am. The next and final section of this paper, the eponymous story, reimagines the writing sample I submitted to enter the New School MFA Creative Writing program—with an added frame story inspired by my time as a TA for Mark Larrimore's philosophy class on the Book of Job.

Yesterday we were busy wetting our beds. Tomorrow we will cough blood onto our updated cellular devices, reading the news one clickbait link at a time. But today (Where are we now? And who is to blame for the past? And where do we go from here? Look, a penny. Under

the tongue!)? All that’s left is to cover what all this means, without prophesizing too much over the bindings, worrying about how to “get it out there,” but simply to put it out, and watch. And, so what, so what? I have no other wish than to collect the papers of the past, the ones that you hold in your hand, and incinerate them. Let this all burn, burn, burn, like a roman candle, yellow and greeny, Ah, O, Hm, like the qaqnus!

(The qaqnus bird is a bird of the mythical kind, home in a middle Asia I might not visit: Uzbekistan. Batuman tells of a great poet Navoi who sings of this great bird, the qaqnus, who gathers twigs and branches all of its adult life. It gathers them and makes a nest. When the nest is complete, the bird sets the branches on fire and burns itself. At the foot of this heap emerges a sapling wet with dew, and nearby another qaqnus is born. This new qaqnus will repeat the cycle, collecting twigs and sticks the whole of its life for that final fiery death that is self-medicated, self-fulfilled and self-regarded. Navoi makes the case that this is the answer to the great riddle of literature. Batuman makes the case clearer by explaining that the great riddle—why are we here, as writers—is to spend our entire lives collecting these branches and these sticks that act as our greatest influences, all the things we read and watch and listen to… that they are fodder for our art, they are twigs to the fire with which we burn ourselves to ashes. I myself would like to go out this way.) That’s my intention.

We explored infernos with frothy mouths. We settled on the shoulders of giants, and let the little kids below jump up on ours. Cliché, you say? Well, STEP ASIDE, I’ll hop off and strike a match, set fire to all the clichés, all the influences, and this damned dream—who’s with me (a penny saved…)? You, my friend? Lackadaddy, woosh.

THE POLYGLOT MANIFESTO

Jeb was a blessed man. He lived in the capital of the world, had many friends, a brilliant career, and the love of his love, a holy pleasure turned holy pain, Sofia.

One spring day Sofia was offered a job in another part of the world. The news devastated Jeb. Sofia reprimanded him for being selfish, for this wasn't the first time, and hardened in her decision. Gathering the belongings she can fit in her pockets, she stormed out of the apartment. The door slammed. Jeb blasted the buttons of his shirt as he tore it off, and fell onto his bed.

"She came, she left, she's gone" he said, and wept for seven days.

After the first day his phone had run out of battery. After the second day his friends, Aaron, St-Pierre and Konstantin, knocked on the door. They sat together in silence the rest of the week, taking turns making beer runs and ordering cheese pizzas.

After those seven days, Aaron spoke:

"Why, why sit here and cry like a baby, damn it, you are a fool, and a fake, and a disgrace. Chin up, boy, you are young, you are free, thank the lord she left. Now you have the rest of your life to find yourself. I for one always welcome change. Do you know how many women there are? More than there are fish in the sea, as the saying goes. Please, my friend, beat your chest not. Look, please, at all that you've got. A chair from your trip to Persia. A rug from your time in Greece. A bed made of the finest German wood. And glass from the Scandinavian north. These were trips you took alone, as all trips are undertaken alone. What you feel now is the truth within us all, all men are alone, only we hide behind lies, and veils. Well, dude, I rid you of that mask. I grant you birthday wish, an endless supply of everything you need. Regard, hark, or how the poets say, my phone. Swipe, swipe, do you find yourself not enthralled? Please

and thank should come out of your mouth, for you are my friend as I am yours. I only mean to help."

Then Jeb replied. These were his first words since his chest broke:

"You scatter my mind and note this room of the lies I have surrounded myself with. You are so just, O, what friend you are. You point to my possessions, then tell me I have laid veils before my eyes. What are you, some hypocrite, some blast from the past, damn you. I don't want your words. Leave me alone. Let me starve to death. Yes man came out to this world alone, yes he was naked, but were we not connected by the cord of our mothers? You seemed to have been choked up in yours, for your brain lacks both the oxygen and the reason with which to comfort me. I need nothing. I need no one. You are right to say I am alone, for even in your miserable company I am an island. Someone pass me a slice of truth. Give me some wisdom. Or else leave me alone!"

Aaron spoke again:

"You are the worst, in a worse state that your silence showed you in. You are wretched, scraggily and a piece of excrement, no worse, you are the seeds of a rotten apple inside of the excrement of your own antipathy. I have set you up with dates before, and you always came back to me with tales and with low fever. But now, you have wound up winded and aghast for a love now past. Say what you have to say, for I will listen, for I am your friend, though I can't see why I should be any more."

Jeb tossed under the bed sheets, and from under them spoke:

"Good, now I cannot see my tormentors."

St-Pierre pulled back the sheets and spoke his mind:

“Mon frère, écoute moi, you silly, silly brother. I do not doubt your love, for love comes once or comes not at all. What you lost is a great thing. Would man survive without a heart? Non, je dis, et j’ai dit encore. But, mon frère, are you not breathing? Are you not alive? I say unto you that you have not been stabbed by the venom of a love truly lost. Either she comes back or you have some part of you still beating. So giggle with us. Drink a shot with us. Soon the bars will call us down to their bosoms, and soon our bosses will hand us some slips. Mais, I say blast them all, positions in companies come and go, as do flighty partners, but you, your soul, and mine, and ours are here, and we hip-hip-hooray to your health!”

Jeb shook his head, and spoke:

“How dare you compare love and work, for love is the most downhill of all errands, things fall apart and things dissolve into oblivion, and all you say is a lie! Why drink when the liquor of your evasive spirit will pour out through the holes that your words have pierced in my body? Why celebrate in a time of mourning? Do I dress in white at your sister’s funeral, and relieve myself atop of your father’s grave? I would rather see you jump out from my window and watch you grow wings than hear the lies coming out of your mouth. Do not test me, do not challenge my love, for if there was one thing I know to be true it is that I am still in love, though now it is lost, and its absence forms a deeper impression than do your idle words.”

Konstantin had been in the kitchen for most of his time at Jeb’s. But now he wanted to speak, so he spoke:

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, the time for talk is over. The time to fight is now! I agree there has been too much talking, too much blabbering, so much horse neighing and parrot parley. Cast open the curtain blinds. Let some light and fresh air into this stinking room. To be honest it doesn’t come from outside but from within. All that is outside is good. All that is in here is

cursed. I would leave in a heartbeat, jump out the window as you say, or otherwise. I would rather bathe in a night sky or bask in the glory of a golden haired dawn than mope around and lose my vitality to misery. Take the shot and let's go. Take the drink and be done. We have villages to explore, mountains to climb, and fish to fry, of the many in the sea, as the saying goes."

Jeb roared:

"Damn you, and damn you, and damn you! With friends like these. How can the one thing which I feel deepest be something from outside of myself? Do you know how many layers one has to pull to reveal oneself to another? Do you know how beautiful it is to see a banana peeled, to see an onion pulled apart, to gnaw a watermelon from the inside out? I speak in your language, of fruits and vegetables, because your brain hasn't any other way. And I speak only of another opening up to me. But still this is besides the main idea, my point, which is no matter how much you tear away there will always be a naked kernel in the middle, an untouched truth, a purity unreachable, and this is what I felt with her, and this is where my love emanated from, and damn you for groping my insecurities, my frustrations, my anguish, to provoke a movement in me. You had better wake up a sleeping bear, for he would be kinder to you than I will be if you keep up your pestering."

A window is opened, and a breeze blew the ash off an ashtray.

"And what emerges is a polyphony of sounds, a confluence of tongues, a rainbow of vision. Y lo que ocurre es una polifonía de sonidos, una confluencia de lenguas, y un arcoíris de ver. Et ce qui se passe est la polyphonie, la confluence de lange, et un arc-en-ciel de vue.

"But something is missing. I look about and see immediately a colorful world around me, though I know not how long it should last. There is architecture too, of the last Roman emperor, the first

Byzantine one, some ottoman, some new. The sight is divination. The names of kings is endless. The names themselves infinite. We know the city as Istanbul, Constantinople, Byzantium, the Sublime Porte, New Rome, Augusta Antonina, Lygos, so many names for the same thing: I think of different languages, and what it all means. Our present state starts at the closing of the book, but I am no kabbalist, and the Irish monks aren't on my mind either. I return to the scene. I plant my feet over the ceramic tiles.

"Mosaics of Moses, and incense to Christ. Ahead of me is the Virgin Mary holding the Godhead on her lap. A golden halo can be made out, but we are too far away to read the lettering. I approach, and cast not a glance to the scaffolding about, not a peek to the tourists, the schoolchildren, nothing but focus on the important forward motion, one foot in front of the other.

"I recall the name of this building, and in so doing, conjure up an image of its exterior, while still inside: the Hagia Sophia. The Sacred Wisdom. Ayasofia. Only two years before I stood before the Sacred Family on the opposite end of the Mediterranean, and prayed to its gothic statues outside and gazed up through its stain glass rose window. La Sagrada Familia. The sister to this monument, hand in hand in my mind: like fiction and truth.

"Where is your Polyglot home base?

HEARSAY TAKEN AS AXIOMS:

Show don't tell

Kill your darlings

Italicize your foreign language

Beauty is born of struggle, convulsion, etc

The artist must be these or is not beautiful

RULES TO BE BROKEN:

Forget the axioms

Follow a tradition and build upward

Do as I say don't do as I do

Address readers concerns, or don't

Live like every day were your last, which is to say write that way too

DIVINATIONS FOR A RAINY DAY:

Borrowed from Sofia Coppola, the more you know who you are, the less you let the things that don't matter bother you

Borrowed from Federido Manuel Perralta Ramos, controlá lo superable

Borrowed from Pooh Bear, oh bother

Borrowed from Kokopeli, TOOOOT

Borrowed from a man of numerology, lo unico que hay en la vida es el enfoque, todo lo demás es demonio, distracción, mentira

"You always wondered what I meant, and so you left me. And today you wonder why I am alone, but you know why deep down. But I am still here, and I walk to the pulpit, which faces clockwise to Mecca, at the foot of the final dome. Under Mary, like two pigeon breasts, read two words in ornate arabesque script. To her left is Allah. To her right is Mohammad. They read thus:

ﷲ محمد

"I am in utter awe to find myself between these two round art words, and under the navel that has led me to face the city in the Tihamah plains of Saudi Arabia, a site of polyphony and confluence itself.

"A friend of mine once dated an American who spoke fluent French. Another friend traveled to France to meet a Japanese exchange student fluent in calligraphy. Another friend came onto a Gypsy bard, versed in all tongues, and yet found no one behind that wall of colors.

"A man dressed as a security guard grabs me by my chin. He teaches me a prayer, the prayer of all men. The muezzin begins. 'La ilaha il Allah,' he chants. I repeat. 'La Ilaha il Allah.' We are all one. All this mess. I will never reach that unity contain in God, but nevertheless I am one, one.

"Like Job I deny His existence, and call Him here.

"Like a reader, I misunderstand and blame not myself.

"Like you I am playing games. You sit still, and approach not.

"The man rubbing my chin now rubs his cheeks. I repeat, only with him, the father, the man of men. I decide never to shave again. And then I turn around.

"All color has faded. This was what was missing. The draining of all life and diversity around me. No cerulean. No russet. No brick red, no snake green, no golden sun. There is only a blue berry far away, with a red belt and white cheek. It is you.

"Truth had its turn that day. Let this be fiction. Let this be false. This will be draft one and I don't give a hoot because I am not copying yesterday but adding to it and being alive in the present moment with is all that can be asked of me and I am over repeating the same story over and over and over again why is the whole point of jabbering away at this moment. Allow me to say what I would have said. Our friends are back home all of those, and they are waiting for us with a pack of cold ones and a rolled one, and an uncorked bottle of blended cabernets.

"The same vow of birth, but in for languages, each time deeper to the heart of who we are went on like this:

"But before that, you represent all the color of the world. Just a magnifying glass held to the ground on a sunny day and shines and the entire density of a block of light into a fine point, we

shall incinerate. Blow up. I've the sweet life. We are not lost. No translations. The careful reader is a cuckold and the best ones know me.

"Looking at one another in the eyes the way we used to when we were first meeting.

"I love you I say.

"Je t'aime you say.

"Yo te amo I say.

"Я люблю тебя you say.

"Time falls away. All is understood, if only for un puñetro momento. Tous est pareil, la même chose, we know. And if this piece has done anything to the reader I hope it does what it did to me, obliterate me into a thought, a thousand little pieces, a polyphony of voices, a cacophony of noise, and a spectrum of light waves and a confluence of emotions and a conflation of pounds, something, something and the rest is up to you."

Just then Sofia entered the room as a whirlwind. The objects in the room were flung around. The friends huddled in the corner. Jeb listened. Sofia spoke:

"Where were you before we met? Where were you when I needed you? How many birthdays and anniversaries have I remembered and you forgotten and have I reminded you and had you thanked me? Why do you yell when it is you who won't follow? Why do you scream and kick and beat your chest when you don't come? Why must I be the voice to all your problems? Why do you blame me? Why do you curse love when you say it was always inside of you? Will that leave you? Am I leaving you now that I am here and will always be here? Will you not listen? Will you not bow down for once, or is your head so big it cannot but touch the ground? What are these? What are those? Are the things around you not what you have put out for me? Are not the clothes on your back but ways to let me in in undressing you? Have not I

been there for you, and so where are you now that I need you? Will you? Have you? Can you? Should you? How many questions trouble your heart? How will you make space in a time of need? What has all this been? And who are you? What are you? And who are you?

Jeb dropped down on his knees.

“If what you say is true, then I am through.”

Sofia ordered Aaron, St-Pierre and Konstantin to leave at once, and cursed them for asking where she had been the last few days; “With my parents, you fools! Now off with you, y’all little ones!”

And the couple put their heads together.

The end.

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