Does Literary Translingualism Matter? Reflections on the Translingual and Isolingual Text

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ABSTRACT: Though it has an ancient pedigree, literary translingualism manifests itself differently in different cultures. But does the question of whether a text is written in L1, L2, L3, or L4 matter to the creation or consumption of literature? Most writers believe it does. To determine the difference it makes might require testing a translingual text against one by a rare author who is completely monolingual. Translingual texts are often metalingual, self-conscious about language itself. Though the circumstances under which L2, L3, or L4 was acquired matter, translingual authors tend to exhibit great cognitive flexibility and a greater awareness of the relativity of things.

TRANSLINGUAL (i.e., written in a language other than the author's primary language) texts have an ancient pedigree, beginning perhaps shortly after the invention of writing itself, when Etruscans, Anatolians, and Carthaginians appropriated the newly devised alphabet brought by the seafaring Phoenicians not only by adapting it to their own unlettered tongues but also by writing in Phoenician — probably not epic poetry, but at least invoices for commercial transactions with the Phoenicians. Within the far-flung empires of antiquity, citizens wrote in the imperial language — Greek, Latin, Persian, Arabic, Chinese, Sanskrit — regardless of what they spoke at home. Indeed, Yasemin Yildiz argues persuasively that what she calls the "monolingual paradigm" did not emerge until late eighteenth-century Europe, but that paradigm was ignored, brilliantly, by the modernist trinity of Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad, and Vladimir Nabokov.[1] Modern Hebrew literature was created by writers — including S. Y. Agnon, Yehudah Amichai, Aharon Appelfeld, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Yosef Chaim Brenner, and Shaul Tschernikhovsky — who came to Hebrew from Yiddish, Russian, Polish, German, and other

[1] Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 2.

European languages. Postcolonial literature, by authors such as Chinua Achebe, Raja Rao, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, is generally written in the language of the European metropolis rather than the local tongue.

It is probably true that every translingual writer is translingual in her or his own way. And that translingualism resonates differently in every era and culture. Movement among languages is much less remarkable in India or Switzerland than it is in relatively insular Japan, where Yoko Tawada spent a monolingual and monocultural childhood. "When I was growing up, I never even heard any other languages besides Japanese," Tawada recalled many years later after settling in Germany, where she has been writing in both German and Japanese. "The people whom I know, the Japanese people in my environment, they all speak only Japanese. As a child, I did not even know that other languages existed!"[2] It took until 1992 for a *gaijin*, a non-Japanese, to receive the prestigious Noma Literary Award for New Writers. Hideo Levy's winning work, *Seijouki no kikoenai heya*, later translated as *A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard*, remains an oddity that is said to be the first novel by an American published in Japanese. By contrast, it is not uncommon for a publisher in Paris to bring out a book written in French by a nonnative speaker.

However, before we begin, for example, to juxtapose Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* (1937) with her own version of it in Danish, *Den afrikanske farm* (The African farm, 1937), it is appropriate to ask: Why is such an analysis important? What difference does it make that a given text was written in an adopted language — in L2 or even L3 or L4? Is a translingual text inherently distinguishable from a monolingual one? Is it inherently more interesting?

As a preliminary caveat, it is necessary to recognize that languages are dynamic continuums, not discrete, static entities. To enter into a particular linguistic community is to jump into a rushing current that is not entirely isolated from other flows. All languages are mongrels and carry echoes of the Babel from which they emerged. And, as Rebecca Walkowitz observes, it is a mistake to pigeonhole many contemporary texts within a single linguistic category. Numerous works are, as she puts it, "born translated," existing simultaneously in more than one language.[3] Because genocide and assimilation had eliminated most of the readership for his primary language, Yiddish, Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote to be read in translation, though he stubbornly continued composing his fictions in his *mame loshn*. Furthermore, if we consider that even the most obdurate xenophobe who refuses to learn anything but L1 negotiates several registers (slang, formal, intimate, regional, standard, etc.) of just L1 each day, are we not all multilingual? Are not all texts translingual? Nevertheless, Beckett's *Molloy* (1953), written in the Irish author's adopted French, is a different kind of creation from, say, *Candide* (1759), which Voltaire flippantly claimed was "traduit de l'allemand de Mr. le Docteur Ralph" (translated from the German of Doctor Ralph) but which he in fact composed himself in his native French. Is the difference an important one? Or is the category of "translingual literature" an arbitrary, pedantic contrivance?

Indian novelist Rao dismissed the whole subject. "The important thing," he contended, in English, not his native Kannada, "is not what language one writes in, for language is really an accidental thing. What matters is the authenticity of experience, and this can generally be

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2 Bettina Brandt and Yoko Tawada, "*Ein Wort*, or How Words Create Places: Interview with Yoko Tawada," *Women in German Yearbook* 21 (2005): 5.

3 Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

achieved in any language."[4] Most other translinguals disagree. They are implicitly, or even explicitly, Whorfians, for whom each language entails a unique weltanschauung. "To a greater or lesser degree, every language offers its own reading of life," contends George Steiner, trilingual in English, French, and German.[5] "Even the shape of my face changed when I began to live inside the English language," observed Ilya Kaminsky, a poet who is quadrilingual (Ukrainian, Russian, American Sign Language, and English).[6] If languages were perfectly interchangeable, there would be no reason to undertake the arduous task of switching languages.

Many translinguals describe a sensation of split personalities, as if each language embodied a different self. An extreme example is Louis Wolfson, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic and whose 1970 memoir *Le schizo et les langues* (The schizo and languages) is a curious amalgam of French, Hebrew, Russian, and German — anything but English, the mother tongue he detested in part because of a strained relationship with his biological mother.[7] Rosario Ferré, the Puerto Rican novelist who wrote some books in Spanish and some in English, contended: "A bilingual writer is really two different writers, has two very different voices, writes in two different styles, and, most important, looks at the world through two different sets of glasses. This takes a splitting of the self that doesn't come easily and can be dangerous."[8]

Nevertheless, translingual authors do not always conceive of their condition in terms of loss. "I see no reason to give up one language if I can help it," declares Ferré. "Having two different views of the world is profoundly enriching."[9] Speaking French rather than his native German is similarly emancipating for Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (The magic mountain). It enables him to overcome his inhibitions about flirting with the married Clavdia Chauchat. As he tells her, *en français*, using the intimate *tu*, though he would not have dared to address her as *du* in German: "Moi, tu le remarques bien, je ne parle guère le français. Pourtant, avec toi, je préfère cette langue à la mienne, car pour moi, parler français, c'est parler sans parler, en quelque manière, sans responsabilité, ou, comme nous parlons en rêve" (As you've surely noticed, I barely speak French. All the same, I would rather speak with you in it than in my own language, since for me speaking French is like speaking without saying anything somehow — with no responsibilities, the way we speak in a dream).[10]

For Oscar Wilde, writing his play *Salomé* in French rather than his native tongue was an additional way to shock and offend the English, the colonialist usurpers whom he, as a proud son of Ireland, despised. As he explained: "Français de sympathie, je suis Irlandais de race, et les Anglais m'ont condamné à parler le langage de Shakespeare" (French by sympathy, I am Irish by race, and the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare).[11] There are almost as many reasons to switch languages as there are writers who adopt another tongue. But

4 "Raja Rao," in *Interviews with Writers of the Post-colonial World*, ed. Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 147.

5 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 473.

6 Edward Clifford, "(Not Quite) 10 Questions for Ilya Kaminsky," *Massachusetts Review* 21 (May 2018), https://www.massreview.org/node/6577.

7 Louis Wolfson, *Le schizo et les langues* [The schizo and languages] (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

8 Rosario Ferré, "Bilingual in Puerto Rico," in *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft*, ed. Steven G. Kellman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 138.

9 Ibid.

10 Thomas Mann, *Zauberberg* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1924), 407; Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Knopf, 2005), 401.

11 Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 351.

whether they view the switch positively or not, almost all acknowledge that switching languages makes a profound difference in what — and how — they write.

More significant than the way that translingualism makes a difference for the writer is the way that it makes a difference for the text, which means the difference that it makes for the reader. Does it really matter whether a novel, story, poem, or play was written in L1, L2, L3, or L4? Consider this thought experiment. Let's apply a blind test. Could we take an unknown work and tell merely from textual evidence whether it was or was not written in the primary language of its author? If we could tell, would the fact of its translingualism mean a profound difference in style or content or quality?

One way to pursue this inquiry is to take a work by a patently monolingual writer and compare it with a work by a translingual. We can of course easily name hundreds, if not thousands, of important translingual writers, from Achebe, who wrote in English rather than Igbo, to Feridun Zaimoğlu, who writes in German, not Turkish. But it is much more difficult to identify a writer who is completely monolingual. Jacobean England was separated from and suspicious of the rest of Europe. However, though Ben Jonson famously wrote that William Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek,"[12] the speech in *Henry V* in which Alice, the lady-in-waiting, tries to teach Catherine, a French princess who is to marry Henry, the English words for parts of the body is conducted in French (act 3, scene 4). Nor did John Milton, a few decades later, restrict himself to English only. Though Samuel Johnson, impatient with the polyglot, polymath Milton, would complain that he "wrote no language,"[13] the author of *Paradise Lost* in fact wrote poetry in Greek, Italian, and Latin, in addition to English.

There may be some monolingual writers in North Korea, perhaps the most isolated nation in the world, where writers are reportedly constrained to employ their talents extolling the supreme leader. Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il themselves both published books, and according to his official — and incredible — biography, the current supreme leader of the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, wrote 1,500 books during his three years at Kim Il-sung University. In any case, before assuming power, each of the Kims lived abroad and no doubt acquired some knowledge of languages other than Korean.

So perhaps it is to the United States, the nation of immigrants where the second and third generations strive to assimilate to English-only, that we must turn to find the best specimen of monolingual writing. According to one report: "Less than 1 percent of American adults today are proficient in a foreign language that they studied in a U.S. classroom"; and "Only 7 percent of college students in America are enrolled in a language course."[14] However, monolingualism is not conspicuous among major American writers of the nineteenth century, most of whom were educated in Latin and Greek. If we are looking for a monolingual author, it would certainly not be the polyglot poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who translated from French, Italian, and Spanish and was a professor of modern languages at Harvard. Nor would it be Washington Irving, who spent twenty years as a diplomat in Spain. Nor Herman Melville, who traveled widely as a sailor before settling down to write. Mark Twain wrote vivid accounts of his travels abroad

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12 Ben Jonson, "To the Memory of My Beloved Master, the Author Mr William Shakespeare," in *The Complete Poetry*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin, 1988), 263.

13 *Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Brady and William Wimsatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 442.

14 Amelia Friedman, "America's Lacking Language Skills," *Atlantic*, 10 May 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com /education/archive/2015/05/filling-americas-languageeducation-potholes/392876/.

and, in an 1880 essay titled "The Awful German Language," described his struggles learning German. Though he recalled, approvingly, a Californian who "would rather decline two drinks than one German adjective," Twain was conversant enough in the language to deliver a humorous lecture in Vienna in 1897 titled "Die Schrecken der deutschen Sprache" (The horrors of the German language).[15] And of course much has been made of Twain's mastery, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, of vernacular English and of what has come to be called Ebonics. The ventriloquism of American speech that Twain orchestrates in his novel led Shelley Fisher Fishkin to hear the echoes of African American voices.[16] Henry James, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway, and Saul Bellow were certainly not monolingual. Even Emily Dickinson, who rarely strayed outside her home in Amherst, Massachusetts, studied Latin, and the quantitative prosody of Latin poetry was a model for her own work.[17]

The Jim Crow South was probably the most isolated part of the United States, and its bard was William Faulkner, who concentrated almost all his fiction in rural Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. Faulkner himself never finished high school and, aside from training as a pilot in Canada, had no experience abroad until after he won the Nobel Prize. Creolization — the mixture of cultures, races, and languages — is the ultimate horror for the characters in the Yoknapatawpha cycle. Yet even Faulkner's Anglophone Mississippi bears traces of French — in names such as Lucas Beauchamp and Charles Bon. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, when Thomas Sutpen brings a cargo of African slaves back from Haiti to work his plantation, we are told that "the negroes could speak no English yet and doubtless there were more than Akers who did not know that the language in which they and Sutpen communicated was a sort of French and not some dark and fatal tongue of their own."[18] Thus is another language, in this case Haitian Creole, inscribed into Faulkner's monolingual text, as an object of dread.

To find a genuinely monolingual control against which to test the difference made by translingualism, we might have to turn to the isolated Pirahã people of the Amazon. However, as studied by Daniel Everett, their language, unrelated to any other extant language, lacks an alphabet and thus any written texts to compare with those of Beckett, Conrad, and Nabokov.[19] Moreover, if Proust is right and "[l]es beaux livres sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère" (Beautiful books are written in a sort of foreign language), then *all* literature aspires to translingualism.[20]

So, instead of insisting on a monolingual/translingual binary, it makes more sense to situate all writers along a continuum of departure from L1. Since most writers are multilingual or at least vary the registers of their primary language, it is probably more precise to refer to them not as monolingual but rather as isolingual. An isolingual writer is one who writes in a language identical with his or her L1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who studied Latin, Greek, French, Italian, English, and Hebrew, was multilingual, but because he wrote exclusively in his native German, Goethe must be considered isolingual.

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15 Mark Twain, "The Awful German Language," in *A Tramp Abroad* (Toronto: Belford, 1880), 384.

16 Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

17 See Lois A. Cuddy, "The Influence of Latin Poetics on Emily Dickinson's Style," *Comparative Literature Studies* 13, no. 3 (1976): 214–29.

18 William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 27.

19 Daniel Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle* (New York: Pantheon, 2008).

20 Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ed. P. Clarac (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971), 305; Marcel Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. John Sturrock (New York: Penguin, 1994), 93.

So we are left with the question: Are there any specific markers that signal the translingual origins of a text? When not altered by scrupulous book editors, calques — examples of locutions transposed from one language directly into another in which they are at best awkward — would certainly constitute echoes of a prior language. According to his wife, Jessie, Conrad (né Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski) spoke English with a thick Polish accent. And his English prose is a palimpsest of L3, English, superimposed over his L2, French, over his L1, Polish. In *The Secret Agent* (1907), when Conrad states that Adolf Verloc "pulled up violently the venetian blind" and that, gazing at Winnie Verloc, Ossipon "was excessively terrified at her," the word order and choice betray the fact that the author is not a native speaker of English.[21] Arguing that Conrad's prose is haunted by French ("l'anglais de Joseph Conrad est littéralement hanté par le français"), Claude Maisonnat has documented many gallicisms spread throughout his fiction.[22] Nevertheless, a reader in search of something distinctive about translingual writing ought not to be reduced to hunting for calques. Is there not something more significant that distinguishes translingual writing?

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "the dialogic imagination" owes much to assumptions about multilingualism. Bakhtin argued that echoes of other languages accounted for the heteroglossia of classical Latin literature. "Roman literary consciousness," he wrote, "was bilingual. . . . From start to finish, the creative literary consciousness of the Romans functioned against the background of the Greek language and Greek forms. From its very first steps, the Latin literary world viewed itself in light of the Greek word, *through the eyes* of the Greek word."[23] Bakhtin notes that both Aramaic and Oscan were also part of the linguistic mix of the Roman Empire and contends that multilingualism alone enables us to step outside any particular language and realize that what we take for granted as "natural" is in fact a function of that specific language. However, Bakhtin's claim that all genuine novels are dialogic would include texts by isolingual authors and recognize that the ability to switch voices is not unique to translinguals.

Nevertheless, most of us who have ventured at all beyond L1 become Whorfians to the extent that we sense that each language offers its own template through which to process space, time, number, self, and other fundamental categories of experience. All things being equal (though they often are not), translingual authors are better equipped than isolinguals to step outside the prison-house of language — or at least of L1 — and to make us aware of the factitiousness of verbal constructions. Translingual texts are often metalingual in their self-consciousness about their own linguistic medium, the way they make language itself strange, subjecting it to what Viktor Shklovsky called *ostranenie* — defamiliarization.[24] Nabokov's love of puns, anagrams, and palinodes foregrounds his linguistic medium. In *Pale Fire*, when he makes translation from the fictional language Zemblan a crucial element of the story, a reader is obliged to think about the nature of language itself. In *La leçon* (The lesson, 1951), Eugène Ionesco, who wrote in French, not his native Romanian, dramatizes the absurdity of primers for learning English. Andreï Makine's novel *Le testament français* (The French testament, 1995; translated as *Dreams of My Russian*

21 Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 84, 254.

22 Claude Maisonnat, "Le français dans l'écriture conradienne" [French in Conrad's writing], *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 78 (2013): 29, https://cve.revues.org/959.

23 M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 61.

24 Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3–24.

Summers, 1997) is in effect a paean to the Russian-born author's first love: his second language, French. In *An Unnecessary Woman* (2014), Rabih Alameddine, who writes in English rather than his native Arabic, foregrounds language by telling the story of an elderly woman whose meager life revolves around secondary translation — rendering into Arabic novels that have already been translated into English or French. Autobiographies by many translingual authors — among them, Ariel Dorfman, Eva Hoffman, Hugo Hamilton, and Luc Sante — are in effect self-begetting linguistic memoirs, the story of how the author achieved enough fluency in a second language to use it to write the book we are reading. Made strange, language is no longer just the medium but itself becomes the object of attention.

Yet not all translingual texts are reflexive, and not all call attention to language. Writing thirty-one novels, including popular successes such as *Captain Blood* (1922), *Scaramouche* (1921), and *The Sea Hawk* (1915), in his sixth language, English, Rafael Sabatini aimed for a transparent style that does not call attention to itself but instead invites readers to lose themselves in the colorful adventures of his characters. Writing in English rather than her native Russian, Ayn Rand was more interested in pushing her polemics about what she called "ethical egoism" than in reflecting on the medium of those polemics. Nor do translinguals possess a monopoly on reflexive fictions, as evidenced by *The Tempest*, *Don Quixote*, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (In search of lost time), and *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (If on a winter's night a traveler) — all written by isolinguals.

In her book *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration*, Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour finds "cognitive flexibility," "tolerance for ambiguity," and "greater awareness of the relativity of things" to be characteristic of the Russian translinguals she studies.[25] It is tempting to apply those terms to all translingual writers, since all evince a willingness to readjust such categories as time, space, quantity, color, and gender through which language helps them apprehend the world. However, some distinctions ought to be made. Ambilingual translinguals — those who, like Fernando Pessoa (Portuguese and English), Mendele Mocher Sforim (Yiddish and Hebrew), Munshi Premchand (Hindi and Urdu), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (English and Gikuyu), and André Brink (Afrikaans and English), write in more than one language — might be thought to demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility than writers such as Julia Alvarez, Aharon Appelfeld, Edwidge Danticat, Assia Djebar, and Irène Némirovsky, who choose a language other than L1 and stubbornly stick with it as their sole medium of literary expression.

Aneta Pavlenko argues that the age at which a second language is acquired is a crucial factor in differentiating among bilinguals. Age of acquisition would probably also be useful in making distinctions among translingual authors and their texts; the fact that Nathalie Sarraute began learning French as a little girl when she moved to Paris from Russia marks her as a different kind of translingual from Wassily Kandinsky, the painter who wrote in Russian and German but composed poetry in French only when he was in his seventies. Pavlenko also distinguishes among coordinate bilinguals ("who learned their languages in distinct environments and have two conceptual systems associated with their two lexicons"), compound bilinguals (who "learned their languages in a single environment and, consequently, have a single underlying and undifferentiated conceptual system linked to the two lexicons"), and subordinate bilinguals ("typically classroom learned

[25] Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 102.

who learned the second language via the means of the first, have a single system where the second-language lexicon is linked to conceptual representations through first-language words").[26]

In speciesist English, "to parrot" is to repeat something mindlessly. Yet birds clearly do have minds, albeit nonhuman, of their own. In 2014, when a parrot named Nigel was returned to his British human companion, Darren Chick, four years after disappearing, Nigel spoke Spanish rather than the clipped English that Chick had taught him.[27] "¿Que pasó?" is the way he greeted his old companion at their reunion. If Nigel could be called an avian translingual, he would also have to be classified as a coordinate translingual. Other examples of coordinate translinguals might be Gary Shteyngart, who grew up speaking Russian in Leningrad but switched to English after moving to the United States at age seven, and Aharon Appelfeld, who, a native speaker of German, did not begin learning Hebrew, the only language he wrote in, until he left Bukovina for Palestine at age fourteen. Examples of compound translinguals might be Breyten Breytenbach, who grew up speaking both Afrikaans and English, and Anita Desai, who grew up speaking German, Bengali, and English. Examples of subordinate translinguals are Beckett, who grew up speaking English but studied French at school, and René Descartes, who grew up speaking French but studied Latin at school.

Compound translinguals would seem most likely to be gifted with cognitive flexibility. The compound translingual's ability from an early age to balance two or more separate linguistic systems simultaneously probably demands a greater awareness of the relativity of things than the sequential initiation into another linguistic template involved with both coordinate and subordinate translinguals. However, most translingual writers would seem more attuned to ambiguity than most isolingual writers. Translingualism would seem to incline writers toward metalinguistic awareness, manifested in ostentatious verbal play and in reflexive constructions that lay bare the devices of their art. Nevertheless, some translingual writers are largely indifferent to the linguistic medium they happen to be using. And, conversely, work by some isolingual writers is acutely self-aware. William Shakespeare's plays-within-plays and the metafictional architecture of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* were not produced by switching languages. Moreover, even the most dedicated scholar of translingual literature could not contend that translingual literature is necessarily superior to isolingual literature. Though Apuleius, Yehuda Halevi, Petrarch, Munshi Premchand, and others managed to create enduring texts in an adopted language, no one can gainsay the achievements of isolingual Sophocles, Virgil, Li Po, Shakespeare, Alexander Pushkin, and Charles Baudelaire.

Nevertheless, what makes much translingual literature particularly compelling is the sense that it is haunted by an absent referent — L1. The language memoir *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989) recounts how Ewa Wydra became Eva Hoffman by departing Poland at age thirteen for Canada and then the United States. For too long, she finds herself suspended between her native language and her newly acquired one: "Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences; they're not coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, words have

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26 Aneta Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind and What It Tells Us about Language and Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 18.

27 "Missing Parrot Turns Up minus British Accent and Speaking Spanish," *Guardian*, 17 October 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/oct/17/missing-parrot-british-accent-speaking-spanish-california.

not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed."[28] Even after she becomes an accomplished professional writer, in English, Hoffman uses her second language for metalinguistic reflections on the insurmountable chasm between thought and expression. Wistful over her inability to recover her Polish self, Anglophone Eva invokes a Polish word, *tęsknota*, to convey her nostalgia, sadness, and longing, even while noting that those English words are incommensurate with the Polish.[29] Like other translingual works, *Lost in Translation* is a linguistic echo chamber tinged with the exhilaration and melancholy of stepping outside a language, if only to step inside another.

The lives of translinguals are of considerable anecdotal interest, and the texts they have produced are marvels of adaptation and invention. The poems, plays, novels, short stories, and essays by writers who have switched languages offer rich material for understanding language, the imagination, and the experience of what it is to be human, or even a parrot. A

[28] Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), 107.

[29] Ibid., 4.