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Introduction

From Babel to a Possible Pentecost: The Abracadabrant Word and the Invention of "Xenoglossia"

PRELUDE: WHAT IS XENOGLOSSIA?

This book charts the fugitive and dynamic mode of citizenship that can be embedded in poetic language—specifically translingual language, language crossing national lines, aimed directly or indirectly against the jingoistic monolingual agendas that mushroomed and are mushrooming under fascism. The works explored within these pages host a formative if fleeting poesis that undermines the prescriptively homogenous definitions of community innate to modern geopolitics. Such poetic worldmaking takes place in vectors of linguistic stretch and cross-contamination, modeling paths toward alternative republics—republics in which poetry (and its undervalued kith, translation) might assume a central agency.

I name this literary and linguistic work *xenoglossic*, intending to distinguish it from the reputedly seamless code switching of the bilingual native or the polished multilingualism of the cosmopolitan traveler. Both poles of polyglot practice, implying unmarked fluency, have dominated discussions of multilingual literature to this point, though in reality the lion's share of polyglot practice is uneven, incomplete, shored up less by self-possession than by a striving and an attendant anxiety of *belonging less* than one's compatriots, or of not having compatriots at all. Xenoglossic theory as I develop it within these pages distinguishes practices of speaking or writing languages in a condition of unbelonging, unauthorized by some tacit alchemy of the anointed involving blood relation, fluency, and unaccentedness—or else class-dependent mobility and a proper education. The writers that have compelled me to devote years to construing such practices deploy xenoglossia as a literary resource—a site of invention at once aesthetic and, as I will insist, political.

Xenoglossic practice is characterized, as we shall see, by obstructions to legibility that have routinely been relegated, by some ideologically determined instinct,

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to the category of the opaque (often in the form of the *glossolalic*, or an unintelligible speaking in tongues) or else of the simply wrong: it is shot through by seams and ragged edges where linguistic systems have been sutured together, perceived dysfluencies and awkwardnesses of grammar and of speech, linguistic jerks, hiccups and chokes, cross-encroachments of vocabulary and syntax that betray the way the cohabitation of sign systems within a single person or community inevitably generates friction—and fresh creation. Abject as xenoglossic authors may tend to be in terms of established power structures, their work is characterized by the dazzlingly or difficultly intelligible rather than by opacity. This book proposes that we cross-examine and push past the hermeneutic reflex that leads us to stop reading when confronted by obstructions to legibility. Continuing with yet altering the visual metaphor, we might characterize xenoglossic writing as iridescent—registering that brilliance of motion and encounter that Deborah Bird Rose and, earlier, Howard Morphy thought through in glossing the Aboriginal concept of bir'yun, or shimmer, as a zone of coinventive "reciprocal capture" with Western thought.[1] In these writings, the demi-legibility of a poet's ecstatic deployment of languages "foreign" to their conscripted domain draws in attentive readers to exceed their own domains of fluency, disclosing fresh traffics of thought and of beauty—and triggering mutual transformation of the linguistic cultures in the crosshairs.

Poetry After Barbarism studies xenoglossia as it emerges in twentieth-century literature. It hones in on a series of vivid episodes leading up to and following those notoriously vicious ethnonationalist movements that the West erroneously hoped to have extinguished by defeating the Axis powers at the end of the Second World War. It does not address twenty-first-century neo- or para-fascism directly, instead positing that a combination of lacunae in the modern canon (caused by the passing over of texts in marginalized languages, including those spoken by hundreds of millions of people, like Brazilian Portuguese), deficient archives (caused by the passing over of difficult or noncompliant bodies of work), and the rash resolve of affected nation-states to "move on" from first-wave Fascism (distinguished in this book with a capital F) has resulted in a picture of fascism's manifestations and instances of opposition that lacks key passages. Understanding Fascist ideologies of language and culture is essential if we are to resist the tragedy or farce of permitting history to repeat itself once again, and poetry constitutes an unembedded matrix of resistance that clarifies these ideologies through antagonism to the language in which they are grown. I contend that we must exceed the terms of a collective education that permitted us to end up in the current state of affairs scarcely eight decades later in order to analyze rather than being stupefied by contemporary fascist manifestations, and to invent a shared language in which to rebuke them in the current day.

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Fascism relies on impoverishment of the citizenry's linguistic and cultural resources—tactics visible in the "defense" of the Italian language beginning shortly after Mussolini's 1922 March on Rome, encompassing neopurist wars popularly disseminated through a newspaper column and commercially successful book of strategies for "purging" neologisms, "exoticisms," and barbarisms under the title *Barbaro dominio* (*Barbaric Dominion*, 1933), and which resound in the Third Reich's "protection" of the German language beginning in 1933. The reduction of subjects to what German philologist Victor Klemperer, a victim of Nazi anti-Semitism, called "unthinking and docile cattle in a herd driven and hounded in a particular direction" relies on the dulling of their capacity to express themselves as individuals or independently thinking collectives. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler underscored the need for effective propaganda to confine itself to a handful of slogans in line with the masses' limited capacity of understanding and enormous "power of forgetting"; Klemperer sarcastically dubbed the resulting language Lingua Tertii Imperii (LTI), a form of fanatical oratory aimed at stirring emotions, conjuring bankrupt superlatives and a banal sense of historicity. Hitler saw the lack of common blood and a common State language as core elements of the Habsburg monarchy's weakening, and the "de-Germanizing" of villages "slowly but surely thrust into the danger zone of mixed languages" as part of the tragedy that led his glorified "rebels" to rise up against a government that failed to represent "national love for the Fatherland and People."[2] Needless to say, the language of a People conceived as monolith needs to disavow the ineluctably shared histories and futures of speech and writing, which deposit themselves in linguistic resources representing a treasury of exchange impossible to shut down: a perpetual transmutation taking place in the ungovernable work of ears, mouths, and hands absorbing and passing on difference.

Such purist attitudes bespeak dubious programs aimed at walling off language and, by extension, race that pervade nationalisms on the democratic and "liberal" side of the spectrum as well. As president of the newly formed Turkish Republic, in 1928–29, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk initiated a campaign of "Turkification" that has been compared with its contemporary Fascist parallels, as it mandated eliminating Ottoman Arabic script, instruction of Arabic and Persian language in schools, and terms within the Turkish language emerging from these cultures in the name of secular liberal (modern Western) ideals, while ordering Turkish minorities not to speak their native languages in public.[3] In a 1946 article positing that "the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language," George Orwell petitioned the public to "defend" the English language through a number of well-worn rules of simplification, including: always cut words if possible; never use the passive where you can use the active voice; "Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent"; and "Break

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any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous."[4] In the United States, widespread prejudice and abuse targeting the use and even heritage of languages other than English dates back to the era of boarding schools for Indigenous children (forbidden to speak what were historically approximately five hundred distinct Native tongues); this attitude suffused the hysteria surrounding mass immigration at the turn of the twentieth century as well, and is far from extinct. On the campaign trail, the current president, renowned for the limited vocabulary of his populist fulminations and rally chants and of his 23,000 tweets, tested out a talking point surrounding the menace represented by foreign languages unknown to himself: "We have languages coming into our country. . . . These are languages—it's the craziest thing—they have languages that nobody in this country has ever heard of. It's a very horrible thing."[5] This attitude was consummated in an executive order issued when this book was in press designating English as the "one—and only one" official language of the United States for the first time, part of an effort to "reinforce shared national values"—a startling and legally questionable departure from the heritage of a nation still acclaimed as a melting pot.

The present study homes in on cases that expose such rules not only as hopelessly out of step with the realities of twentieth-century subjects, but as politically and culturally stultifying. Individuals' relations to language are far less stable, this book will show, than myths of the mother tongue and national language—and even the presumptions of "plain language"—allege. Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin* argues that no tongue is exclusively one's "own"; since no master can maintain "relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological" with language, the master must thus "pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation" that is "always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as 'his own.' " Poet/translator/theorists in his wake like Pierre Joris operate according to the premise that "Language is the stranger, the other . . . which always, and irremediably so, remains the outside."[6] I focus on authors who, while lacking a common geopolitical identity, share the condition of having been molded (negatively) by nationalism in its most virulent and essentially modern form—as a tribal myth predicated on the homogenization of an ineluctably mixed race, language, and culture or as a settler-colonial construct predicated on the eradication of Indigenous sovereignty and on the statelessness and inhumanity of people whose ancestors were abducted from afar. I study cases in which the prescripts and privileges of full-blooded citizenship and a chance at "mastering" the dominant State language are rejected, fled from, or withdrawn; yet in the sense developed by Édouard Glissant in *Le Discours antillais*, here "non-mastery . . . of an appropriated language" triggers "critical revision" of the authoritarian, prestigious language's hegemony—or to deploy Glissant's original French term, "domesticage."[7] My genealogy therefore exhumes from these authors (and from

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the many I might have included had I had several tomes of exposition at my disposal) a solidarity and kinship of orphans whose works constitute testing grounds for future-oriented poetics. I do not treat here an equally crucial subject: the vying for nationhood by minoritized groups who have historically been deprived of that status and whose political recognition would at least trigger hope for a radically different outcome—for some counter to that endpoint of romantic nationalism after which Theodor Adorno declared the composition of lyric poetry to be barbaric.[8]

The core questions of this monograph derive from a dozen years of research toward my 2012 book *Locomotrix*, which having manifested in a lengthy critical introduction and translations of Amelia Rosselli, a refugee from European Fascism, ranging from her first to her final works, had still not exhausted the questions opened up by her invention of a "cubic" poetic stanza aimed at hosting all possible rhythms of all possible languages: Can poetry ever come to constitute a universal language, like its reputed corollaries, music, gesture, and painting? Is it possible to forge a universal poetry in a world of divisive national idioms—a world haunted by the specter of fascism? Are poets who transgress national grammars indeed capable of quashing the political boundaries between cultures that so often doom interchange, or are they fated to the status of the barbarian?

Lacking a "mother" tongue in the ideologically familiar sense, Rosselli invented a "cube-form" as a means of harmonizing the roiling linguistic energies within each of her stanzas—tidal jerks of which are unmistakable in the free verse of sequences not subject to this rule. Rosselli's work has commonly been discussed as multilingual, and indeed, her early experiments manifest the sort of cross-lingual play that we normally associate with that term. The trilingual games of her "Diario in Tre Lingue" comply with this sort of treatment, as the poet positions herself at a high noon of accumulating political and literary geographies:

midi italien
Anglais-Américain
France littéraire
Italie Classique-Moderne
Le Chinois
smattering of German
Latin
Greek

contraption littéraire

contrazioni (cramps)

hystoire phonetik[9]

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Smatterings of the "foreign" within a largely French text may well be what triggers the phrase "literary contraption," shot through with suspicion, before morphing into contractions, or birthing cramps, lodged in Italian and English; these are followed by the coinage "phonetik hystery"—mingling "history" with "hysteria" and spelled, as if to creolize, the French phrase with a phonetic -k instead of a -que.

The mature translingual poetic of Rosselli is more disconcerting than any accumulation of foreign smatterings of the sort that she discovered early on in the multilingual modernists and rejected. To distinguish her xenoglossic poetics, it is necessary to attempt analysis of the more subtle discomposure of poems that appear to be composed in a single language. The lyrics of "Poesie," dated to 1959, and published in the collection *Variazioni belliche*, pursue an anachronistic mode with obvious tethers in metaphysical verse and the dolce stil novo. One of various references to Donne's Holy Sonnets appears in a secular prayer about death and reason:

> Fui, volai, caddi tremante nelle
> braccia di Dio, e che quest'ultimo sospiro
> sia tutt'il mio essere, e che l'onda premi,
> stretti in difficile unione, il mio sangue,
> e da quell'inganno supremo mi si renda
> la morte divenuta vermiglia, ed io
> che dalle commosse risse dei miei compagni staccavo
> quell'ansia di morire
> godrò, infine,—l'era della ragione;
> e che tutti i fiori bianchi della riviera, e
> che tutto il peso di Dio
> battano sulle mie prigioni.

> I was, I flew, I fell atremble into the
> arms of God, and may this final sigh
> be my entire being, and may the wave abounty,
> straits in difficult union, my blood,
> and from that supreme ruse may death
> become vermillion be rendered me, and I
> who from the ardent riots of my comrades detached
> that anxiousness to die
> will relish, at last,—the age of reason;
> and may all the white riviera flowers, and
> all the weight of God
> beat at my prisons.[10]

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At first blush, this lyric is comfortably "Italian," though hailing back to a moment and mode when Italian was hardly a national language. Yet the subjunctive mode here, that of a secular prayer, produces a range of ambiguities that slow reading and hermeneutic operations reveal; we might rashly read them as mistakes before thinking through how these deviations from grammatical expectation become poetically generative. The construction of "e che l'onda premi, / stretti" (following "sia" earlier in the line) leads us to believe both "premi" and "stretti" are meant to be subjunctive verbs qualifying the wave that pushes and pulls tight. "Premi" might read initially as the "premere" or "push" of the wave but ends up resolving as the subjunctive form of the verb "to award/repay/honor," so that we may hear both constructions at once, teetering between the simple present of one verb and the subjunctive mood of another. In propulsion from the preceding subjunctives, one presumes "stretti" to be a verb; however, the subjunctive form of "to grasp/clasp/pull tight" would be "stringa," so it becomes clear that "stretti" is instead a noun ("straits" or musical "strettos"), likely chosen for its assonance with all the "t" sounds of "tutt'il," "tutti" and "tutto," and finally "battano" (batter, à la Donne). In translating I've attempted to twist expectation in another way, hoping "abounty" might get at the awarding and the binding in a single word, as well as the way that "premi, / stretti" trips up reading. That the speaker's blood is marked as hybrid in precisely these phrases, as plural straits (or quickening musical passages) difficultly united, subtends the greater environment of linguistic, cultural, and indeed racial uncertainty that pervades Rosselli's oeuvre—an uncertainty that beplagues all xenoglossic writing and that distinguishes it from more familiar versions of multi- and translingual practice.

The apparently simple, prayerlike "Fui, volai" casts a blood-tinged death as the endpoint of the age of reason. It recalls the fact that Rosselli kept a photograph of her savagely assassinated father and uncle, lying in their own blood in Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, at her desk. (Having learned of this fact, I proposed to publish this image in the biography I developed for *Locomotrix*, but the photograph mysteriously disappeared.) While examples of xenoglossia in Rosselli are innumerable, I foreground this moment sounding her evolved poetics of "phonetik hystery" because the prayer's beating exemplifies her irony surrounding reason writ large. Rosselli's irony—in which death represents the consummation of the age of reason—harmonizes caustically with Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: that the ultimate consequence of Enlightenment is a new form of death, a new form of barbarism.

The poet must become a barbarian to this barbarity in order to speak back to it. This means that she is bound not to be understood except under duress, for in an age that rewards only ready clarities, translucent luminosity is automatically treated as blockage, as affront. Umberto Eco reinforces in a retrospective analysis of "Ur-Fascism" or "Eternal Fascism" that "all the Nazi or Fascist schoolbooks

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made use of an impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning."[11] The Frankfurt School theorists glossed the ideology of "clarity" from Los Angeles in May of 1944: "By tabooing any thought which sets out negatively from the facts and from the prevailing modes of thought as obscure, convoluted, and preferably foreign, [the concept of clarity] holds mind captive in ever deeper blindness. It is in the nature of the calamitous situation existing today that even the most honorable reformer who recommends renewal in threadbare language reinforces the existing order he seeks to break by taking over its worn-out categorial apparatus and the pernicious power-philosophy lying behind it."[12]

Poetry may seem the most abject of genres when it comes to resisting fascism; poetry that inspires knee-jerk responses of being off-key, awkward, and wrong—the xenoglossic poetry with which we will tarry in the following pages by exemplars Rosselli, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Emilio Villa, Etel Adnan, LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Chika Sagawa, and Sawako Nakayasu—will certainly appear ever so much more powerless to the skeptical reader. In resisting false clarity, however, this poetry casts out into public discourse precious shards of liberty, with critical "remnants of freedom, of tendencies toward real humanity," as Horkheimer and Adorno put it—"even though they seem powerless in face of the great historical trend."[13] Amelia Rosselli's heroic father, too, had publicly acknowledged the apparently abject status of resistance movements against the rise of Fascism. In honoring martyrs such as the recently deceased Antonio Gramsci on May Day of 1937—roughly a month before his own murder—Carlo Rosselli wrote of the new society, "It seems the passage to a higher phase of coexistence is impossible before we have reached the depths of abjection."[14]

In order to comprehend the political and cultural stakes of this poetry and the xenoglossic mode of song and critique that it will develop, we need to understand the linguistic, cultural, and political contexts out of which it emerged. That task must take us back to the dawning international consciousness to be overshadowed by xenophobic political motions ascendant at the turn of the twentieth century.

BELONGING TO NO KNOWN LANGUAGE: HENRY JAMES AGAINST THE MELTING POT

Upon revisiting the city of his birth after two decades of expatriation in Europe, in 1904, Henry James took to recounting his "impressions" surrounding the overwhelming infusion of immigrants into Manhattan with a notorious stupor

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that nevertheless led him to lucid reflections surrounding the future of language in the New World—and beyond. James's musings, composed amid an upwelling of xenophobic sentiment that accompanied the entry, that decade, of roughly one million foreign nationals to the United States per year, were prompted by his encounter with the "cheerful hum of that babel of tongues" in Central Park, where what James densely refers to as "the alien" seemed quite at home and (quite discomfitingly for the white expatriate) "in possession" of the metropolis of his birth.[15] Ever the self-conscious writer, James articulates the impossibility of comprehending the horde of "facts" transported into New York from remote lands in opaque linguistic terms, facing the countless new "racial ingredients" introduced to the changing metropolis in dumbfoundedness:

> He doesn't *know*, he can't *say*, before the facts, and he doesn't even want to know or to say; the facts themselves loom, before the understanding, in too large a mass for a mere mouthful: it is as if the syllables were too numerous to make a legible word. The *il*legible word, accordingly, the great inscrutable answer to questions, hangs in the vast American sky, to his imagination, as something fantastic and *abracadabrant*, belonging to no known language, and it is under this convenient ensign that he travels and considers and contemplates.[16]

Synthesis of these ambiguously exotic ingredients and facts hovers in the form of an "ensign" under which the newly alienated New York native travels and that is as obscure as a conjuror's charm, "belonging to no known language" and challenging both cognition and expression for the author of prose; knowing and saying are italicized here, emphatic yet simultaneously registering as foreign to the passage. James's coinage to describe this "*il*legible word" is apt: the word *abracadabra* hangs between languages, nonsense, and purely performative spell. A Kabbalistic term, it is riddled with numerous and conflicting folk etymologies and has been claimed to derive from ancient Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew.[17] The "*abracadabrant*" word hovering over the land in James's hallucination is poignant as an emblem but riddles the classification of any proper "ensign," or national flag.

Through the sangfroid of immigrants strolling uptown, James comes to fathom that "the general queer sauce of New York," which unifies races through taste in the "hot pot" of the metropolis, is actually the concoction of "the alien himself" and that gentlemen such as our guide are already feeding from it: "Is not the universal sauce essentially *his* sauce, and do we not feel ourselves feeding, half the time, from the ladle, as greasy as he chooses to leave it for us, that he holds out?"[18] James's particular form of xenophobia differs from that of popular US representations of selected immigrants as those who would not assimilate; a

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FIGURE 0.1 C. J. Taylor, "The Mortar of Assimilation—And the One Element that Won't Mix," *Puck*, June 26, 1889. Collection of the National Museum of American History. A feminized allegory of the United States tries to mix, by pestle, a mortar filled with caricatures of ethnic types, including one unruly figure who rises above the rest, wearing a sash reading "Blaine Irishman."

cartoon published in the humor magazine *Puck* on June 26, 1889, captioned "The Mortar of Assimilation—And the One Element that Won't Mix" features a feminized allegory of the United States attempting to blend caricatured racial types (Black, Indigenous, Ottoman, and European) in a mortar labeled "CITIZENSHIP" with the spoon of equal rights, grimacing at an inassimilable Irishman wielding a bloody knife (figure 0.1). On the other hand, orchestrated scenes such as the graduation ceremonies of the Ford Motor Company English School—wherein students from some thirty-three cultures donning traditional costumes from their homelands were directed to reemerge from a massive "Melting Pot" stage set wearing American dress, fused beneath a banner reading "E PLURIBUS UNUM"—presume that the linguistic histories of these laborer-students will have no impact on the English they have been taught to absorb as a precursor to citizenship and fair pay (figure 0.2).[19] The metaphor of the greasy sauce that fuses cultural elements that James would rather leave distinct lends carnal

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FIGURE 0.2 Ford Motor Company English School graduation ceremony, Highland Park Plant, 1916, in which students donning traditional costumes emerge from a "Melting Pot" wearing "American" clothing, reflecting their linguistic and cultural assimilation. Image from the Collections of The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan.

expression to the threat represented by ingesting the influence of these subaltern ladlers from the melting pot. That the mouth becomes the locus of taste as opposed to speech in James's ruminations on the "vast hot pot" suggests that when placed among people so culturally remote, the Anglo-American author is not merely rendered speechless: rather, a primal displacement of bodily functions necessary for linguistic function threatens to be undone (since discourse, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us in their work on minor languages, always requires a supersession of eating, or "a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth").[20] Whereas Whitman was able to produce ever more and more English to synthesize and absorb such facts (both those surrounding the genocide of Indigenous nations and those hailing from foreign territories) and to insist that all, however curious, are part of the "simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme," James understands these to be scenes of unbrotherhood.[21] James's comments were prescient, published a decade before the outbreak of the First World War and two decades before the Asian Exclusion and National Origins Acts that prevented Asians from entry into the United States and set quotas on Eastern and

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Southern Europeans. What's more, the novelist understands that the language of the future is opaque to him.

James's parallel encounter with "superlatively southern" Italian landscapers digging at an estate on the Jersey shore leads him to claim that the picturesque "colour" of exotic types encountered by the gentleman excursionist in Europe, on a "rural walk in his England or his Italy, his Germany or his France," falls away in this "land of universal brotherhood" under the work of "a huge whitewashing brush" applied to the foreigner, making the "vague warmth" of sociability impossible for the uncharmed and no longer sovereign gentleman's heart and producing a "puzzle, . . . for the head."[22] At the same time, James gripes at bottom that despite the efforts of "the on-coming citizen" to assimilate, "there is no claim to brotherhood with aliens in the first grossness of their alienism."[23] James's insistence as "restored absentee" on the brotherhood being manufactured for "millions of little transformed strangers" that arrive in the United States as too mechanistic and banalizing, on the one hand, and beyond consummation, on the other, encapsulates the anxiety surrounding not only the visual identity of the American population he has deserted but also its language.[24] What sort of tongue will emerge from "such a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients" as is harbored in New York's "huge looseness"?[25] James can only pose a question that will, of necessity, find innumerable answers, most of which would never be committed to writing, let alone standardized as a national language or literary school.

James's vision of the abracadabrant word manifests both the utopian promise of the " 'ethnic' synthesis" that was to be achieved in the century to come, emerging through forms as different as skyscrapers of Babel and the wireless "global village," and an anxiety surrounding the integrity of national languages legible in encroaching political motions—from the 1907 Dillingham Commission to the 2017 Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment (RAISE) Act (both aimed at curtailing US immigration by privileging applicants literate in English).[26] This anxiety would turn into a monolingual agenda more emphatic with the jingoism of the world wars: Theodore Roosevelt would write in 1919, "We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house."[27] Yet to his credit, James recognizes that if the earth is ever to be of one language and one speech again, as it was before Babel, that speech will not be recognizable to the cosmopolitan author and his assumed audience of literate settler Anglophones. As he muses, "The accent of the very ultimate future, in the States, may be destined to become the most beautiful on the globe and the very music of humanity (here the 'ethnic' synthesis shrouds itself thicker than ever); but whatever we shall

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know it for, certainly, we shall not know it for English—in any sense for which there is an existing literary measure."[28]

As reticulated as James's prose is, it will not burst the existing lexicon or literary measure to that extent in representing this cultural welter; instead, it takes recourse in an audacious proliferation of liquid metaphors—of melting in a hot pot, of being served a greasy foreign sauce, of swimming in a "sallow aquarium," of washing in a "terrible tank."[29] The task of transforming an existing literary measure in the United States and the world over, as migration and conflict abroad lead New York to become but the most renowned example of " 'ethnic' synthesis" in the global metropolis, will in key instances be left to the genre we commonly identify as poetry—a genre in which transformations of reigning narratives more readily unfold through the reformulation of language. Modernist artists across the globe who embraced the linguistic welter being generated by mass migration and global telecommunications would soon consummate James's portents through poetic experimentation as they forged idioms resisting comprehension as national. Despite James's patent xenophobia and his shock at soundscapes such as that of "a Jewry that had burst all bounds" in the murmurs of "the dense Yiddish quarter," the polyglot Jewish modernist poet and translator Louis Zukofsky, for one, would later claim such consummation and adopt as literary ancestor "H. J. intensely in / New York the year I was born."[30]

LA XÉNOGLOSSIE AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1905, the year that James's essay was published in *North American Review*, both references to the myth of Babel and the compensatory dream of a common language were profuse. This was the year that the first World Congress of Esperanto was convened in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, on the edge of the English Channel. It was also the year that the term *xenoglossia* first appeared in print to describe a phenomenon contrasting starkly with the rationalized mode of debabelization represented by auxiliary languages. "Xénoglossie" was coined by a French physiologist and future Nobel Prize winner to describe the inexplicable experiences of a medium, Madame X, who wrote long sentences in Greek while in a trance, without having studied the language.[31] Xenoglossia (also known as xenolalia) has come to denote the intelligible use of a natural language one has not learned formally or does not know—a concept distinguishable from (though often confused with) glossolalia, or lexically incommunicative utterances. The canonical

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narrative of this phenomenon in Western literature reaches back to the story of Pentecost in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, wherein a burst of divine breath is said to have descended upon the followers of Christ, bestowing upon them suddenly the ability to speak in languages previously alien to them. As the King James edition renders it: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind [πνοῆς/ pnoēs ('blowing, wind, breath')],[32] and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

The Holy πνοῆ, spirit, breath, or Ghost whose fire descends upon the disciples enables Galileans—who would have been understood by the audience of Acts to be uneducated—suddenly to speak the native languages of pilgrims from the many nations of the Jewish diaspora present for the feast of Pentecost. These groups would have traveled to Jerusalem from every corner of the known world spanning modern Iran to Egypt, and they are named in a list crafted, as biblical scholars have argued, to undermine Rome's claim to universal rule: "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, / Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, / Cretes and Arabians."[33] Artifacts such as the twelfth-century Cupola of the Pentecost in Saint Mark's Basilica emphasize the harmonizing of nations implicit in this story, picturing in mosaic tesserae the convergence of pairs of young and aged men representing each of the distinct peoples listed in Acts via the rays of the Holy Spirit and divine fire enlightening the preaching followers of Christ (figure 0.3). This event is widely interpreted as a remedy for the confusion of tongues meted out as divine punishment for construction of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:5–8: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Yet unlike Babel, which has become a ubiquitous cliché in the literary criticism and theory of our times, the dream of Babel's resolution in Pentecost through the reconciliation of languages has received very little attention outside of religious contexts.

The story of Pentecost tends to emerge in instances of linguistic confusion when the need for translation is on the rise, and it generates a fascinating tension with the ideology of the mother tongue. My intention in studying its invocation throughout the twentieth century is not to adjudicate the factuality or lack thereof of religious or secular testimonials but to understand the aspirations to channel an unmastered tongue into literature—and to ponder the effects of poems of secular "pentecostal" strain upon their linguistic and political ecologies

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FIGURE 0.3 Anonymous Greek masters, Cupola of the Pentecost, Saint Mark's Basilica, Venice, twelfth century. Photo by Dennis G. Jarvis. CC BY-SA 2.0. Depicts the Holy Spirit, Apostles, and representatives of sixteen peoples to whom the apostles preached: labeled, as according to the Acts of the Apostles, *Parthi, Medi, Elamitae, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontum, Asiatici, Phrygiam, Pamphiliam, Aegiptum, Libiam, Romani, Judei, Cretes*, and *Arabes.*

of adoption. While presumptions of nationality and nativity continue to govern the reception of literary works, mass migration, colonization, war, and trade place greater and greater stress on the putative intimacy between any given subject and a single mother tongue in the twentieth century, such that in a range of contexts, as Jing Tsu demonstrates in her study of global language exchange and governance in the Sinophone world, "just how one manages to arrive at the inside of language, to command its use and to maneuver its effect, and to become an anointed member of its community of speakers hardly looks easy."[34] Becoming an anointed member of the community against a backdrop of variously unfolding strains of xenophobic racism, in the mildest instances, and, in the most extreme, of waves of "palingenetic ultranationalism" (to cite Roger Griffin's canonical definition of

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revolutionary fascism) is particularly onerous.[35] The recurrent upwelling of fascist populism across the globe has made clear the importance of the relatively flexible, which is to say ideologically cynical, Italian archetype of this political drive (identified by Eco via "the philosophical weakness of its ideology"), which continues to serve as synecdoche for manifold manifestations of totalitarianism.[36] The Italian case provides a vivid point of critical departure in revealing the peril of origin myths, as a perceived border crisis in an economy of decline revitalizes the appeal to a spectral "Italianity," resulting in a dominant political order (Fratelli d'Italia or Brothers of Italy) that is a direct descendant of the neofascist Movimento Sociale Italiano. I present a range of cases in this study—from that of the Alexandria-born avowed Fascist modernist F. T. Marinetti through contemporary poet-theorists of the rigorously internationalist anticolonial Black diaspora—to propose that the translingual poetry of the unanointed, however marginalized in reception for ideological reasons, should be read as political trial and errantry against this backdrop of shifty, performatively besieged, irrationalist traditionalism.[37] Situating poetic experiments that counter the multifaceted evolution of white supremacy within the longue durée of Pentecostal longing historicizes their reach for communion across entrenched cultural divisions but also their interrogation of concepts of nationhood and of belonging via blood, milk, and soil.

The unstudied or inspired, even divine or otherwise paranormal channeling of natural languages by subjects deemed improper to those languages places on display language's bursting at its imagined seams in accounts of experience that transgress policed national and ethnic divisions—such that the resultant idiolects come across as dissonant, dissident, made for no given group or no yet-extant one, destabilizing the authoritarian dicta and myths of rootedness notoriously enforced over the course of the twentieth century. The disfluency in these poets' use of multiple language systems, however conscious, has a disconcerting effect contrary to the satisfying hermeneutic game of multilingual modernist monuments, which boast masterful pastiches that formed the building blocks of a new canon—and it is wobblier than any fluid act of code switching. Indeed, the eccentric qualities of these texts cause them to seem impossibly bizarre, opaque, and shrouded to hermeneutics, such that despite their uses of natural languages, a critical tic for their analysis becomes not translation but their classification as nonsemantic, leading to the frequent invocation of glossolalia.[38]

Naming these works "xenoglossic" signals their character as translingual and unlearned rather than cleanly macaronic or prone to code switching—less fluid or fluent than the poetry of bilingual authors, yet not authorized as cosmopolitan. I deploy the term to underscore that such poetics, however disorienting, are *not* nonsemantic, distinguishing them from the act of speaking in tongues with which

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they are often confused because of their disobedience toward borders between national languages. As a result of the transmogrified form of literacy they demand, we are compelled to read these poems and the poets that compose them as latent citizens, rather than casting them outside the borders of the overweening national language as barbarians. In the process, these texts perform their own critiques of the sociobiology of blood and reformulate notions of kinship as wrought of intersectional vigilance, solidarity, and mutual recognition in the process.[39] Such poetics achieve a defamiliarizing mode of artistry that we need to reckon with in its translucency (as opposed to invoking by knee-jerk reflex the ubiquitously adopted term from Édouard Glissant, "opacity")—generating glints of refracted meaning that draw in readers of varying remoteness to the language(s) of composition to unlearn natural or national grammars, and to learn again.[40]

This book argues, then, that poets act as forceful agents of linguistic and consequently of cultural change, and that poems poised at the experiential or researched boundaries of language systems make the "translational" elements of all language particularly emphatic, thereby challenging readers to transgress the ideological barriers between one linguistic system and the next imposed by national grammars.[41] Poems composed in "orphan" tongues manifest, often dolorously, their disbelonging to reigning nation-states or fixed communities, while aspiring to craft room for utopian congregations of linguistic and cultural alterity. Such a congregation was formed in literal terms under the name Pentecostalism in the same moment of Henry James's return "home."

THE EMERGENCE OF PENTECOSTALISM: TRANSGRESSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

In the moment when Ludwik Lazar Zamenhof ("Doktoro Esperanto") was presenting the case for an artificial universal language to an audience of linguists, diplomats, and logicians, a multiracial, multiethnic, and mixed-class group of believers led by the African American preacher William J. Seymour in Los Angeles was claiming, among other gifts of the Holy Ghost, the sudden ability to speak in foreign languages without instruction. In the period of James's reflections on the abracadabrant word, a new form of Pentecostalism was emerging in the United States, driven by African American preachers from the South and based on ecstatic forms of worship that included dancing and speaking and singing in tongues. Catalyzed by what is now known as the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, taking off in April of 1906 in a congregation mixing Black, European, Jewish, Korean, Native

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American, and Latino worshippers, Pentecostalism rapidly transgressed national borders, spreading to Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America and eventually gaining five hundred million adherents, as studies of the internationalism inherent and implicit in tongues' "Pentecostal process of transnationalisation" attest.[42] Whereas contemporary Pentecostalism is dominated by ecstatic glossolalia, or "tongues," the phenomenon at Azusa Street was represented as a xenoglossic event, whose sociopolitical implications I wish to recuperate for the purposes of this study. Immigrants told of uneducated white and Black members of the congregation suddenly able to speak in and translate from languages such as Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Italian, Arabic, and Spanish, and local newspapers decried the "New Sect of Fanatics" and "Weird Babel of Tongues"—because worshippers were, to their ears, "Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand" (figure 0.4).[43] According to one key participant, "It seemed as if a vessel broke within me and water surged up through my being, which when it reached my mouth came out in a torrent of speech in the languages which God had given me. . . . I sang under the power of the Spirit in many languages, the interpretation both words and music which I had never before heard, and in the home where the meeting was being held, the Spirit led me to the piano, where I played and sang under inspiration, although I had not learned to play."[44]

In testifying to channeling a multitude of languages, these seminal gatherings of the mission at Azusa Street came under suspicion for promoting "disgraceful intermingling of the races." The Pentecostal evangelist, missionary, and journalist Frank Bartleman, whose chronicles are credited as being key to Pentecostalism's

Los Angeles Daily Times

WEDNESDAY MORNING, APRIL 18, 1906.

WEIRD BABEL OF TONGUES.

New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose.

Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa Street.

Gurgle of Wordless Talk by a Sister.

AMAZING SUIT FOR DIVORCE.

Pretty White Wife Weary of Black Husband.

Friendless Girl's Story of Sorry Match.

Claims She Loved Negro When Married.

FIGURE 0.4 Headline from a front-page article of the *Los Angeles Daily Times* devoted to the Azusa Street revival, April 18, 1906.

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global success, affirmed in his 1925 book *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles* that through these events "the 'color line' was washed away in the blood of Christ."[45] These events represented precisely the sort of racial melting and potential for a transgressive commons at which James finds himself balking when faced with laborers from the Global South strolling in "his" American North: a situation in which the author's cosmopolitan acquaintance with hegemonic European tongues provides little ground on which to broach "the play of mutual recognition," leaving him speechless in the immediate scenario, illiterate in the face of the abracadabrant word, and performatively lacking language at the moment of composition.[46]

Esperantists strove to overcome linguistic difference, but revivalists were perceived as a threat because in acts of tongues and xenoglossia, they occupied zones of linguistic and cultural difference. In 1907, as Jim Crow continued to rage, Seymour, born to recently emancipated laborers and preaching from behind stacked shoeboxes, reinforced that linguistic, racial, and national commingling was central to the purpose of the movement: "One token of the Lord's coming is that He is melting all races and nations together, and they are filled with the power and glory of God."[47] One can imagine how threatening this vision would have been to a white majority and how easily it could have been dismissed as irrational illusion or fakery. One can also easily deduce why academic scholarship and Western theory would shy away from such a concept—while the rational undertaking of building and its deconstruction via Babel would lend itself more easily to theoretical extrapolation.

In a 2016 study titled *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, Ashon T. Crawley elicits from this radical Black tradition of Pentecostalism (within which Crawley was raised, though not without critique) the conditions necessary for unsettling the categorical distinctions of disciplinary knowledge that buttress racist epistemology. He sees in these performances "the perpetual reconfiguration—and, with hope, the dismantling of and building something otherwise—of normative, violative modes of repressive and regulatory apparatuses" that produce the coherence of the state.[48] At the core of this reconfiguration is the phenomenon of tongues, a "linguistic rupture" that for Crawley "announces and enunciates expanded sociality."[49] Crawley foregrounds the question of whether tongues in this tradition is xenolalic or glossolalic and determines that it is the latter, reading xenolalia through its missionizing tendencies as a "settler colonial claim on language."[50] Yet the jubilant adoption of a hegemonic language by a subaltern subject has quite a different effect. While Crawley and scholars such as Frank Macchia have rightly seen in xenoglossia a gesture with colonial implications—implicitly justifying imposition of the Christian Word and doctrine upon a range of Indigenous peoples—I deploy the term here to describe aspirations that invert

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the evangelizing gestures of empire, undertaken by artists on the frayed margins of belonging.[51] Christine Cooper-Rompato's research on women's xenoglossia in late medieval narratives shows that this miracle's "promise of complete equivalence between languages" addresses anxieties and "questions . . . concerning women's 'appropriate' language acquisition, usage, and access to translation."[52] Turning to a much later moment in which the term "xenoglossia" was coined, I sound the ways that the ecstatic, playfully poetic wielding of language by illegitimate outsiders exposes fears and designs that counter them surrounding authority and definitions of community. Gloria Anzaldúa, too, cast the "inaudible" speech of women of color whose schooling "did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages" as an act of speaking in tongues "like the outcast and the insane," and bid her fellow mujeres de color, "Write with your tongues of fire."[53]

I adopt the term xenoglossia as a literary-critical tool to recognize the creative work that individual poets undertake to express themselves in tongues officially foreign to them, within which they have no identifiable authority—transmuting the languages they touch and thereby creating more capacious linguistic mediums and literary forms, albeit ones that will routinely be committed to the margins in their time for being too much, unlearned, agrammatical, dissonant, or outright illegible. By adopting mother tongues that reach beyond the bounds of tradition to which they have been consigned, composing verse from the position of the cultural, lexical, and aesthetic barbarian, these artists imagine and breathe themselves into what the poet-translator-philologist Emilio Villa calls an "ideal nationality."[54] Congregations of linguistic alterity route themselves through individual idiolects that are reversing Babel all the time, albeit in coruscating glimpses, in ways unacknowledged by the academies of national languages and literatures. "World literature" doesn't necessarily take root in academies under the aegis of a discipline founded according to occidental terms of comparison; as abracadabrant operation, it flourishes in the continuum established between one language and the next encountered within independent ears and mouths, individual idiolects striving in deviance toward some common ground, orally and on paper. This work is most prominently displayed and best investigated—because it is focalized—in poetry. Routinely confused in contemporary discourse with glossolalia, or lexically incommunicative utterances, xenoglossia has received scarce critical elaboration as a secular concept despite its unmistakable sociopolitical implications: it represents the incorporation of natural languages by those perceived to be lacking the proper education or birthright—lacking what Jhumpa Lahiri, writing in Italian rather than the Bengali of her parents or the English of her geographical upbringing, calls "una vera padronanza" ("authentic mastery").[55]

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FROM MOTHER TONGUE TO NURSE'S TONGUE: XENOGLOSSIA'S THEORETICAL MATRICES

Narratives of miraculous translation evince a yearning for the promise of correspondence between languages and thereby for erased cultural difference, in instances and loci of vexing cultural amalgamation—though the contradiction between the Christian Pentecost as a resolution of the punishment of Babel and a meting out of authority cannot be denied, and poetic attempts at trouncing the confines of national vernaculars often end up producing work more barbarous than universal. Echoes of the pentecostal urge articulated in a moment when a national vernacular was an exile's dream—from Dante's reckoning with the calamity of Babel to the papal resurrection of Pentecost as a missionizing unification tactic to dismantle Protestant revolt—furnish touchstones of another protohistory of the xenoglossic, from utopian poetics to its compromise as entrenched dogma. Dante Alighieri's *De vulgari eloquentia* (ca. 1304) argues through the Latin medium for an illustrious vernacular in a context of vast linguistic confusion, being an early early-modern example of a search for the origins of distinct common idioms in an Adamic tongue, although in practice, such a tongue can only emerge through mutual interference. Dante's comments on the vernacular as "that which we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our nurses"—not necessarily mothers but nourishers at large—produce tension with modern notions of national language even while arguably being their precursor.[56] My project returns to Dante to decouple mother and tongue, nation and language, for as Gary Cestaro points out, the role of the wet nurse in *De vulgari eloquentia* and its predecessors signals that any originary unity between mother and child is already lost to linguistic experience.[57] This untethering can be productive in dismantling nationalist myths of origins.

The Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite, for instance, identifies Dante as the forerunner of antiestablishment "nation language"—a type of vernacular (whose name, hailing from the streets, is also useful in slyly overturning the imposed "national" languages of colonialism) expressing the submerged African aspects of a linguistically prismatic Caribbean experience that emerges in the context of the dispossession of those ancestral native tongues. Brathwaite avows that such a creole, revolutionizing English from within, can make the colonizing language follow calypso rather than iambic rhythms and cause it to "roar" like a hurricane.[58] While taking the poetics of Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant, Daniel Maximin, and other theorists of diasporic avant-gardes as crucial touchstones, this book does not focus on colonized populations who generated shared creoles as broader historical collectives, nor does it track coherent countercultural movements. It turns instead

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to aspirational or aborted projects taken on by individual poets who lack the intimacy of a household language as a result of historical circumstances triggered or conditioned by fascism and (in the case of my chapter 5) extended outcomes of white supremacy over the longue durée. These poets are thereby compelled to attempt to create, or at least to model, an alternative political community through the allegedly quixotic, generatively abject mechanisms of poetry.[59]

The supple and transitory modality of citizenship that can be embedded in poetic language is theorized by the contemporary poet-essayist Lisa Robertson in a brilliantly compacted "Untitled Essay" on the vernacular that closes her 2012 collection *Nilling*. As a Canadian expatriate in France whose vast intellectual gamut has included translation of such figures as the trobaïritz Na Castelloza and the poet-linguist Henri Meschonnic, Robertson elicits from Dante's poetics of the grammarless vernacular "the collectively accessible speech of the household and the street," a paradigm of mutual, open, and antiauthoritarian political community. Following the theorization of the Aleppo-born French linguist Émile Benveniste, street and household, polis and oikos do not conform in Robertson's handling to the ossified binary oppositions that tend to circulate in canonical discourse: The Latin "domus" indicates everyday operations shared by a port of entry rather than blood, and "civis" indicates not "citizen" but "fellow-citizen" as mutually constituted; rather than a dyadic spatial opposition, the two concepts represent differences in the scale of collective reciprocity for Benveniste and his interpreter.[60] Dante's vernacular, sourced in part from the illustrious mobility of Provençal lyric poetry, models for Robertson the inherently volatile, improvisatory, innovative, and ancient coconstitution of meaning in discourse, which is in turn the basis of an entwined coconstitution of citizens "that vehemently overflows the bordered and policed containment of identity."[61] Casting the poem, in its "urgent social abjection" and thus its institutional and economic evasiveness, as the very "speech of citizenship," Robertson draws both this literary genre and the vernacular away from myths of tradition and of the tribe as closed constructs and draws prosody away from the governance of meter and "measure" (recall here James's "existing literary measure"). Together, poetry and the vernacular form a shapely and shaping, if fleeting, "geopoetics" (a concept leading back to Meschonnic and Maximin) taking place in "wit, excess, plasticity, admixture, surge, caesura, . . . polylinguality and inappropriateness," challenging the Romantic principles of "lexical economy and simplicity" and instead hearkening (with a nod to poet-theorist Lyn Hejinian) to the density experienced when new to a language—to the "native complexity of each beginner as she quickens."[62] Within an ultimately conservative tractate that expresses nostalgia for spontaneous self-expression in an infant tongue, a childhood before exile, the vision of a

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unified Italian language, and the dream of a space and time before Babel, after all, Dante calls upon poets to desert the "'natural' language learned from mothers and nurses, . . . for that which is 'the property of none' (1.18.2)."[63]

This is a different origin story from that of the modern German philosophy of language, conditioned by a legacy of theorizations ranging from Johann Gottfried Herder (writing in 1772) to Jakob Grimm (lecturing in 1851), with Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt in between, which buttressed Romantic notions of the nation-state as an expression of the genius of a particular *Volk* and invoked the primordial bonding between mother and child as a social yet quasi-natural "drinking in."[64] As such, the genealogy of the nurse's tongue, with its destabilizing implications for notions of kinship and community, deserves its own analysis that might enrich the understanding of the "post-monolingual" condition established by Yasemin Yildiz in her essential analysis and critique of the German tradition, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*.[65] My hope is that this circuitry of thought offers a fresh inroad into the reading of poetry that arises in immediate response to Fascist tales of the tribe and the policing of identity through language (which were, ironically, quick to take up Dante as precursor and that resound in the current Italian minister of culture's claim of Dante as the "founder of right-wing thought in Italy")—and that it can suggest, in closing, more capacious ways of reading the surge in xenoglossic poetry of the early twenty-first century, which is being composed against a swell of dangerously purist origin stories.[66]

Theorizing the unique stress on distinct tongues endemic to the early modern period as played out between species of Latin and developing "national" vernaculars against the backdrop of the Second World War, Mikhail Bakhtin concluded that the literary consciousness of the Renaissance "was born not in a perfected and fixed linguistic system but at the intersection of many languages and at the point of their most intense interorientation and struggle," thus forging idioms that "had to be shaped in the very process of translation and had to master concomitantly a new world of high ideology and strange . . . concepts, disclosed for the first time in an alien medium."[67] The poetry at the center of my book registers a struggle to forge emergent, nonnational languages of interorientation and what Emilio Villa will call "dis-sense" in the wake of the conflict that led Bakhtin to his literary-historical speculations. These authors trigger instances of poetic convocation that disclose such processes of stress that fascinated Bakhtin even if, like Dante, they may ultimately, because of their very marginalization, be speaking "into the void of an idealized community of the learned and just," to borrow Marianne Shapiro's description of the audience of *De vulgari eloquentia*. These authors are products of exile, cursed by a fresh task of universalism. "Of each and

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every poet," Shapiro writes, "Dante requires that he follow . . . the path of linguistic alienation by deserting the mother tongue."[68]

In *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, Emily Apter calls on readers and scholars to recognize "the importance of non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability and untranslatability" and endorses world literature only insofar as it deprovincializes the canon and "at its best, . . . draws on translation to deliver surprising cognitive landscapes hailing from inaccessible linguistic folds."[69] Though a desire for a universal vehicle of communication pervaded many poetic impulses in a century of global conflict, poets have a distinct commitment to preserving the untranslatable—to stressing that language is not merely abstraction but trenchantly material fact. The poetry surveyed here does not partake of the dream of a universal language, like Esperanto, but instead works toward communion with the flawed and incomplete material of natural languages as bridge,[70] and it conforms less to the category of global literature than to planetarity as conceived by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a concept the theorist develops as unsusceptible to nation-state geopolitics and then suggestively includes in Barbara Cassin's 2004 *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*.[71] Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* calls for a humbler world literature in which we "imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities." This recasting aims to destabilize the cartography of the globe as defined by a geopolitics relentlessly marshaled by imperial powers, as well as the unevenly distributed information circuitry buttressing this process (a circuitry praised by Marinetti in its primitive forms, as we shall see, and to some extent reproduced in the distant reading practices of world-systems methodology, which comprises significant lapses, particularly regarding languages and literatures of the Global South).[72] Against the knowability and control of the globe that the silicon chip appears to offer, Spivak's planetarity represents an unassuming realm of cultural activism wherein such activities as language learning "distinguished from the learned tradition of language acquisition for academic work" become a crucial part of knowing as a form of solidarity with the subaltern.[73] All of the poets focused upon in my study, after their counterexample Marinetti, engaged in some form of language learning and translation on an autodidactic basis and proceeded to compose in languages without the authority or goal of mastery, while critiquing the ideology of official academies and grammars.[74] We can read their projects as a move toward elective kinship or "kith" (to cite Divya Victor's anti-nationalist, diasporic formation of imagined community) with those siphoned off as "other" in the Manichean understandings that dominate modern culture.[75] Moving further, these poets model the recognition of self and other as a continuum—one manifest carnally within the counterintuitive example of the nurse's tongue.

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In Spivak, in fact, a relation that I will call non-appropriative kithship with subaltern subjects forms part of a critique of subjectivity: Spivak understands identity as "pluralized as a drop of water under a microscope." This conception of identity as a hybrid eddy destabilizes the tethering of identity and origin and highlights the importance of translation, "as one works with a language that belongs to many others," as an act through which we heed our "responsibility to the trace of the other in the self." These ideas are articulated in Spivak's 1992 essay "The Politics of Translation," which considers the problems with translating into "plain English"—as a story titled "The Wet-nurse"—a 1980 work of fiction by Mahasweta Devi whose Bengali title is "Stanadāyini," or in Spivak's literal translation, "Breast-giver."[76] The "plain English" rendering fully assimilates the work of the world-suckler at the story's heart by invoking a conventional, thus comprehensible title and role; by contrast, the ironic, uncanny original Bengali title and Spivak's literal translation of it defamiliarize and contest the sacrifice implicit in suckling as well as the patriarchal and class/caste ideology of the language in which it is couched. The figure of the wet nurse in Spivak's example is freighted in ways that she does not comment upon explicitly but that are worth glossing for the purposes of my argument against the presumptions of the "mother" tongue. For Spivak, language constitutes "a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries." By wielding it in "generating" thoughts, one enters into relation with manifold subjects, and such relations are rendered most palpable in the process of translation, where "we feel the selvedges of the language-textile give way." (The term "selvedge" refers to a finished border that prevents the fraying of fabric, and represents a "corruption" of the late Middle English for "self" plus "edge.") The bond with innumerable unakin others implicit in language use becomes manifest carnally as fluid kithship with non-"relations" in the figure of the child suckling at the breast of the nurse rather than the "biological" mother. I recruit the relations of nurse and suckler implicit in Spivak's defamiliarizing translation here in order to revise understandings of the "mother tongue." Spivak points to the "spacy emptiness between two named historical languages" highlighted in translation as a site of the fraying and dissemination of grammar and logic inherent within the act of communication. She does not fail to acknowledge the sense of the unheimlich or "un-homely" introduced when language is spoken in a place outside of its "native" context, or in the "homely" effort of speaking "across two earthly languages": "The experience of contained alterity in an unknown language spoken in a different cultural milieu is uncanny."[77] In conversation with Alfred Arteaga, she speaks of Samuel Beckett's French and J. M. Coetzee's English—species of expression backed by " 'no recognizable ethnos whose language of exchange' " is the tongue in which they compose—as products of deliberate distancing from

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a tongue prescribed as "natural" to the self: in such cases, to get out from under the oppression of identity within a prescribed native language (the overtly colonial English in Beckett's case, Afrikaans in Coetzee's), "One must clear one's throat, . . . clear a space, step away, spit out the mother tongue."[78]

The poet-performer Caroline Bergvall, of French and Norwegian background yet adopting English as a language of composition, builds upon Spivak's conversation with Arteaga to develop a poetics that expectorates the mother tongue as imposition as well as the largely unquestioned presumptions embedded in this concept: "Spitting out the most intimate and most irretrievable, the most naturalised source language, or so-called mother tongue (this gendering always strikes me as deeply problematic), is a dare, it is dangerous, but it also starts a whole process of re-embodying and re-appraisal of language's spaces."[79] Bergvall identifies with the revolutionary internationalist poetics being practiced by a growing number of writers and artists who are new "arrivants" to the cultures in which they traffic and who need to create "an allegiance or a correspondence, sometimes seemingly from scratch, or from access-points hidden from view, . . . to a complex living jigsaw of multiple markers and untranslated biographical circumstances."[80] Such arrivants to language are drawn to "question what linguistic belonging means, what fluency entails" because "to be in language is not only to be caressed, held, nurtured by 'intuitive' or tonal waves of recognition and belonging." (The Beckett example makes that clear; the Irish writer's spitting out of English in favor of French is a political act, a wrested instance of liberation.) In defamiliarizing the breathed mechanics of speech through performed and written work with sound, language stutter and loss, and ultimately linguistic dislocation, these poets are "released from this kind of unquestioned psychosomatic attachment." The voice as trope becomes, in Bergvall's model, a sited physiological act manifesting traffic between ejected and adoptive languages in the throat's conduit, "like a constant transport that takes place in the exchange between one's body, the air, and the world."[81] Such traffic renders strange the "mother" tongues from which these writers supposedly hail and that hail them, performing the clearing out of ideologically naturalized speech "with a cat in the throat" (an expression translated literally from the French "avoir un chat dans la gorge," or as Bergvall incisively points out, to have a frog in one's throat, in English).[82] For Bergvall, the friction indicated by a cat in the throat, purposefully invoked (with the feminized chatte being particularly libidinally charged for the queer author), stands for the "autography" of speech, its accent, its marking as other (and implicitly, for the animal, other than human, or barbarian). We will witness authors playing upon these dynamics of linguistic obstruction, traffic, disgorgement, and estrangement on both figurative and literal levels in xenoglossic poetry. These

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techniques become channels of unlearning what Bergvall later calls "a voice that speaks for us before we get to speak" in a "confusing, seemingly self-defeating process of dissociation, of 'disloyalty'" that enables new, queer, and subversive forms of kinship and allegiance to emerge.[83]

Such poetics, which occupy the interstices between distinct tongues and media, impart an embodied apprehension of the ways in which language exceeds the transmission of both information and so-called national expression. Our understanding of strategic performances of fragmented grammar can be further enriched by exploring the bases of Antonio Gramsci's conception of the subaltern, which indeed subtends the whole of Spivak's distinguished oeuvre. As political and cultural theory, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is inextricable from his background in linguistics and from his own linguistic upbringing. Gramsci was born to a father of Arbëreshë descent—that of Albanian refugees who fled the Ottoman conquest of Albania—on the island of Sardinia, where, in the year that he moved to the industrial center of Turin on a university scholarship, illiteracy was at 58 percent and standard Italian was experienced as a distant second language.[84] These roots led Gramsci to a dynamic conception of the relation between "spontaneous," fragmented subaltern grammars and "normative" (standard) grammars—one that was potentially revolutionary. In 1918, Gramsci criticized the fabrication of Esperanto as a bourgeois cosmopolitan effort as opposed to a truly international endeavor, opposing its espousal by the Socialist Party: "The advocates of a single language are worried by the fact that while the world contains a number of people who would like to communicate directly with one another, there is an endless number of different languages which restrict the ability to communicate. This is a *cosmopolitan*, not an international anxiety."[85] From early on, Gramsci argued that the creation of a new idiom can only happen from the ground up, not as the result of a top-down formulation like Esperanto. He did, however, advocate for the creation of transnational verbal complexes that could forge solidarity. I propose that the xenoglossic poetry crafted by early readers of Gramsci, such as the polyglot communist refugee Amelia Rosselli, represents a fruit of the philosopher-activist's thinking that he certainly did not anticipate—though both Gramsci and Rosselli, direct enemies and victims of global Fascism, should be more carefully studied if we wish to learn from the most hard-won, suffered varieties of antifascist thought. Another Marxist thinker and poet, Louis Zukofsky, opens his 1943 essay on C. K. Ogden's BASIC English by simply stating the source of the acronym—"British, American, Scientific, International, Commercial"—and goes on implicitly to critique that stance: "Ogden is against 'Babel,' the confusion of many languages. But the refreshing differences to be got from different ways of handling facts in the sound and peculiar expressions

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of different tongues is not to be overlooked, precisely because they have *international* worth."[86] The "international" in these instances preserves the animate material differences that would appeal to a poet and a materialist. When Eugene Jolas, another protagonist of the avant-garde born in the New Jersey Palisades on the west banks of the Hudson River, and best known as the publisher of *Finnegans Wake*, reconceived of "Atlantica" or "Crucible Language" in the early 1940s as a species of polyglossia that "might bridge the continents and neutralize the curse of Babel," it was not "by being an invention like Esperanto or Interglossia" but by absorbing the grammatical and lexical remnants of innumerable idiolects.[87] This "embryonic language of the future," claimed by Jolas as "the result of the interracial synthesis that is going on in the United States,"[88] was already in use and being constantly invented on the fringes of academic language—both by immigrants and by poets such as Joyce, "individuals with sensitive antennae, sensing linguistic decomposition and conscious of the growing trend to abolish the frontier-posts of words."[89] Michael North rightly pointed out in *Reading 1922* that modernism was conditioned by grappling with the impossibility of an international language—by a move from debabelization (aligned with the grandiose effort of centralization in Babylon's Tower) to rebabelization (aligned with the Tower's inevitable fall into disunity, and resultant babble).[90] My study lingers on the wistful aspiration toward communicability. It recognizes concurrently that poets working across or beyond languages continue to crave understanding beyond the nation in a pentecostal key, *and* that the common tongue they forge often emerges as cryptic and easy to banish as illegible—being poised at the threshold of the unintelligible.[91]

Although I have studied, written about, and taught the modernist multilingual monuments, I have reasons for straying from such artifacts in this volume. Modernist multilingual poetry has tended, at least since the New Criticism, to be so mystified in the academic culture of the United States as to render it the involuted suburb of an elitist canon for which Eliot and Pound provide the template, as cosmopolitan epics groping from an English-language core toward arcane literary sources. In the bleakest of all outcomes, US poetry written in multiple languages from 1922 forward has provided the academic basis for generations of gatekeeping rituals. One might have imagined a different future: pupils like those who attended the "Ezuversity" of Pound's Rapallo were—in the utopian mirage in which Ez's Fascism paradoxically played a part—supposed to constitute an enlightened population of intellectual renegades capable of radicalizing the reigning academic curriculum as *"Kulchur."* Indeed, pathbreaking poets abroad, from the Noigandres group in Brazil to Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italy, regarded these polyglot montages as touchstones for a radically international vernacular language,

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transmitting a "volgar'eloquio 又樸" capable of "taking the sense down to the people."[92] ("Volgar'eloquio" is an Italian rendering of "vulgar elocution" and a nod to Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*; Pasolini chose Pound's phrase as the title of his last public speaking engagement in 1976 at a high school in Lecce on the topic of dialect and the schools.[93]) Despite these tethers in the vernacular, cross-cultural and -historical references in cosmopolitan modernist poems appear to offer but two possibilities of reception: they either repel monolingual Anglophone readers or send those compelled beyond the verse to annotations and, inevitably, institutions to accrue knowledge that might begin to make them adequate to the poetry. This book sets out to propose *unlearning* as a critical stance toward relearning and dis-sense, taking "unlearned" texts as its points of departure.

A "BARBARIAN" POETICS

While the historical examples I have furnished above present narratives of xenoglossia, the spontaneous or strategic deployment of unknown tongues becomes a material component of modernist poetries that register the sudden, unruly copresence of previously remote languages in an environment of increased mobility, urbanization, transoceanic telecommunications, and conflict at the turn of the twentieth century. Against a backdrop of unprecedented scales of global interchange and warfare, the desire for a vehicle of expression that would traverse cultural borders necessarily inflected poetry, the art most self-consciously focused on the word—as did the fervor surrounding technologies that seemed to make it possible, from the telegraph to the World Wide Web. It is worth pondering the politics of poetics tractates such as the Russian Symbolist and translator Konstantin Bal'mont's 1915 *Poetry as Sorcery*, which conducts a transcultural study of magical language that emphasizes "the *physical power of words*" as sheer sound and shape, "every word an impulse on the air," arguing that "there are . . . crystalline moments where the souls of all peoples converge" in expression; it was a corresponding postwar desire of Amelia Rosselli, born a refugee from Italian Fascism, "to enclose myself in the alchemies of a language good at every latitude" that triggered this book project.[94] However, the "ethnic syntheses" provisionally generated through xenoglossic verse fail by design to fall into line with prevailing dictates of citizenship through democratic assimilation or fascist colonization (within and beyond the nation-state); they also resist compliance with the economizing drives of communication under globalization through "international" languages such as English. An even more discomfiting rebuke to received ideologies of language,

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people, and state resides in their failure to comply with received notions of possessors of minority vernaculars as comfortably native—with understandings, that is, of "coming from" or "belonging to" any localizable home. Unlike nonlexical sound poetry, xenoglossic poetry occupies an uncomfortable space within the perceivable precincts of, yet skidding across or confusing, national and other localizable languages. In fact, the cross-linguistic research and contamination pervading poetries of the historical avant-garde—from Futurist telegraphic verse through Dada and sound poetry, which appropriated African, South Pacific, and other "tribal" lyrics, to Russian Zaum, with its "transrational" investigation of a lost aboriginal tongue in common, and Surrealist automatism—may be read as xenoglossic to some extent. Though normally characterized as glossolalic, these poetries integrate more or less submerged fragments of human languages; they ultimately locate meaning in an elsewhere beyond the conventions of any single dominant idiom as opposed to negating it.[95] These movements presage the poetics on which I focus in balking any straightforward transfer of meaning from one distinct tongue into another. Instead of accommodating a switch between codes, they reveal the partitions between codes to be arbitrary conventions, and ultimately generate material friction countervailing the proposition that "the underlying structure of language is universal and common to all men," an assumption whose underpinnings in Western metaphysics George Steiner set out to quash in his 1975 tour de force *After Babel* and that enabled a future generation of critics to theorize what is now known as translingualism.[96]

Experiments at the fringes of the seemingly aloof, arcane domain of poetics enable us to witness the vital metamorphosis of language and culture in unanticipated ways despite state denials of cultural traffic and flux. A surprising number of critics continue to fall back on a sense inherited from classical stylistics that poetic discourse acts centripetally "to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world," as Bakhtin charged in *The Dialogic Imagination*, rather than expressing the cultural welter immanent within any national language.[97] Critics and industry tastemakers upholding rigid standards of eloquence propel the genre's "authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative" tendency diagnosed in Bakhtin's canonical yet disputable contrast between poetry and the heteroglossic novel (eliding the radical experiments in "prosification" that Bakhtin recognized in modernist poetry).[98] The critical presumption that poetry is more locally and nationally rooted than prose, which scholars like Jahan Ramazani have continued to battle, artificially extinguishes from the record those poets who reckon with the "Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages" engulfing any object of representation, despite the fact that, as Emilio Villa pointed out in the São Paulo–based journal *Habitat* in 1952, "the . . . most elevated exemplars of human poetry developed, or better,

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deflagrated precisely at the apex of the most confused linguistic mixtures, in the critical punctums of cosmopolitanism" (with Homer writing in "four strata of dialect, and, in great part, overflows of barbarous, that is to say, not Greek, vocabularies," and Dante mixing Tuscan vernacular "with entire tercets . . . in Provençal, . . . French, . . . Latin, . . . Hebrew").[99]

The once scant scholarship attending to multilingual poetry in the modern and contemporary era of nation-forging myths has until recently tended to reinforce a sense that languages exist in isolation, privileging either the citational, appropriative practices of cosmopolitan modernist collage typified by T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Ezra Pound's *Cantos* or the fluidly dual self-representation of bilingual speakers cast as ethnic or racial minorities[100]—with less attention to the creolized vernaculars we see theorized in the poetics of Caribbean thinkers such as Édouard Glissant or Kamau Brathwaite.[101] Even less attention is paid to the ways in which poetry as form may host the invention of singular argots through the commingling of idioms that are elsewhere alien to one another. Beyond the prevailing discursive dyad of elite culture sampling and code switching between authentic and imposed tongues hovers a corpus of polyglot texts hazarded by speakers for whom the concept of a mother tongue has been occluded.

Despite the welcome breadth modeled by the evolving scholarly discourse on modern transnational poetics (as refined by Ramazani and others), it tends to address the canonized sectors of global literatures, which often exclude figures who reject or blur the lexical and grammatical norms of national literatures, and to focus on traditional verse, rather than the forms and media unique to the twentieth century. I have laid out an alternative lineage of theorization here that moves from the ground up: from the process of translation and immanent critique of politically committed translingual poetry that does not conform to canonical understandings of literary movements—believing that these case studies pose valuable correctives to disciplinary rifts. It is for this reason that I have routed thinking in this introduction largely through poet-theorists and translator-theorists: Dante, Brathwaite, and Robertson; Gramsci, Spivak, and Bergvall. (In shifting to the contemporary moment, I will turn to Fred Moten, Nathaniel Mackey, and M. NourbeSe Philip, among other touchstones of Black studies, for a different look at the nurse's tongue under conditions of enforced statelessness.)

Poetry After Barbarism hones in on the fraught inheritance of the "founding fathers" of the historical avant-gardes, with their self-consciously international, cross-media tactics, within the work of postwar polyglots whose writing rebukes the rabid nationalism that coursed through the century's first puerile aesthetic revolution through strategic acts of barbarism—moving from the Italian Futurists and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven through a sequence of

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uncategorizable prisms, primarily among them Emilio Villa, Amelia Rosselli, Etel Adnan, and LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, situating each within a broader context of local and planetary experimentation. My title echoes (and makes a Möbius strip of) Theodor Adorno's notorious remark about the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz. Instead, I name the civilization that produced Fascism as barbaric and make room for xenoglossic and "abracadabrant" occupations of the condition of geopolitical outsider, simultaneously resisting any formulation that might suggest that the end of World War II signaled an end to fascism. The polis created by these poets exceeds prevailing territorialisms, thereby rendering the figure of the barbarian obsolete. While F. T. Marinetti's polyglossy and call to regenerate culture through contact with the "barbaric" attached itself to Mussolini's imperialist agenda, poets working through the immediate aftermath of Fascism forged insurgent verse by blasting national languages open to proliferating channels of influence unmastered.[102] Poets on the margins of citizenship's pronouncements whose expression would be cast as the incomprehensible stammering of the "barbarian" (a concept crystallized during Greek conflicts with Persia in the fifth century BCE and reducing the sound of foreign tongues to babble) rework national idioms via linguistic barbarism and solecisms to trigger spellbinding, however transient and confined, revolutions in poetic language. In the process, they render the ideological concept of a "barbarism" as (according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*) "a word or expression that is badly formed according to traditional philological rules, for example a word formed from elements of different languages" as obsolete and moot. These poets accord with the strategic confusion of outside and inside, of xenos as guest and xenos as host, implicit in Lyn Hejinian's literalization of Adorno's dictum, articulated in the 1995 essay "Barbarism": "Poetry after Auschwitz must indeed be barbarian; it must be foreign to the cultures that produce atrocities. As a result, the poet must assume a barbarian position, taking a creative, analytic, and often oppositional stance, occupying (and being occupied by) foreignness—by the barbarism of strangeness."[103] Intensive attention to this poetry in its estranging linguistic and material demi-opacity refracts reigning debates surrounding global and ethnic literature, as its constantly molting language exposes the permeability of linguistic systems and transfigures the volatile yet still largely inviolate concept of a national tongue.

My thesis is meant to challenge prevailing concepts of nation and nativity that still condition discussions of language and literature and that subtend the infrastructure of institutional spaces within and outside of the academy, even in the wake of the transnational and global turns. Rather than dwelling in the strictly contemporary—in a moment when examples of translingual poetry seem to be multiplying exponentially—this thesis insists on the value of grappling

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with the past and future lessons of fascist ultranationalism. At the same time, I swerve from a definition of fascism that is historically restricted to the first half of the twentieth century because yoking fascism too tautly to the definitions that emerged from that period and circumstance leads to specious assumptions about where fascism may later flourish and how it may direct its constitutive passions of brotherhood and racial hatred—as recent manifestations have rendered clear.

This book practices an exploded historicism that argues explicitly and implicitly for a new perspective on geopolitical edge conditions, involving the rejection or, at the very least, the recession of geographical categories governing cultural criticism that isolate languages and cultures from one another, leading recurrently to the exclusion of vital figures, peoples, and histories. In this endeavor, I heed Angela Last's 2015 call for the undoing of geopolitics via geopoetics (reinvoking Maximin's work and Meschonnic's as transported into English by Robertson).[104] Certain illuminating historical connections between apparently remote loci become evident only when we strategically extricate ourselves from national frameworks; as such, it becomes more fruitful to present my authors as born in and removed from the geopolitical vortices of Alexandria (Marinetti), Swinemünde (von Freytag-Loringhoven), Fondo/Pfund/Fón (Depero), Milan (Villa), Paris (Rosselli), Beirut (Adnan), and Harlem (Diggs) than to present them as exemplary of traditional forms of collective identity. Although multiplying examples is tempting (I think of the writing of my contemporaries and in many cases my cherished interlocutors, Nathanaël, Mónica de la Torre, Julian Talamantez Brolaski, Lynn Xu, Don Mee Choi, Edwin Torres, Eugene Ostashevsky, Will Alexander, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Youmna Chala, Uljana Wolf, Renee Gladman, and Cathy Park Hong; elder luminaries Erín Mouré, Cecilia Vicuña, Rosmarie Waldrop, Myung Mi Kim, and Anne Tardos; and the entire output of presses like Wave Books, Action Books and its editors, the Post-Apollo Press initially founded to house Adnan's work and now harbored by Litmus, and the London-, Toronto-, and Tehran-based Pamenar, to name only a handful), I draw away from the attempt to construct a completist account of xenoglossic poetics. That would be a misstep because the concept of a geopolitically consistent genealogy does not apply to the chosen figures and binding them through the formalist genealogy of the cosmopolitan avant-garde would both overstate their identification with canonical aesthetic movements and undercut their political aspirations (aspirations that this book continually exposes, nevertheless, to be tragically unredeemed, fragmentary, transitory, or even illusory). To tarry with these works is to glimpse a different way of fashioning the planetary.

The intensive study of poetic environments in which national languages improperly merge or are unmoored from their ideological "roots" can bring

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material and affective texture to Anglophone debates surrounding the limitations of mainstream multiculturalism as a management strategy,[105] of cosmopolitanism as a figure for plurality,[106] and of "world literature" as theorized by scholars such as David Damrosch, Rey Chow, Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and Rebecca Walkowitz[107]—debates that have underscored the importance of acknowledging the violence of self-referentiality and reproduced cultural affiliations and differences[108] and of respecting cultural incommensurability,[109] the density of literary artifacts,[110] the intellectual and ethical challenges of undomesticated translation,[111] and untranslatability itself.[112] At times, these debates, purist in their own right, have lost sight of the texture of invention that emerges in what Waïl S. Hassan calls translational literature, the most visible examples of which have been composed by immigrant, exiled, or diasporic authors writing in nonnative tongues. Writing on multilingual literature has often focused on those authors, like Conrad or Nabokov, who mastered an adopted language.[113] Within post- and anticolonial studies, this writing has tended dialectically to contest the debilitating frames of colonizing tongues against tongues regarded as native (extending the charges of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*), whereas diasporic and migration studies have traditionally been committed to models of code switching. A growing minority of literary critics devoted to the term "translingualism" arising out of sociolinguistics have stressed contact and collision rather than dialectics or bilingual fluency, which is to say, they stress the dynamism of linguistic and cultural boundaries, invoking movement not only between and across languages on a spectrum but beyond them, with the *trans-* as a prefix meaning additionally to invoke an epistemic upheaval of the categories traversed. This movement "recognizes difference and promotes plurality while rejecting ideologies of homogeneity and hygiene that govern assumptions about language and how language should be used."[114] As Lydia Liu lays out in *Translingual Practice*, this methodology, which presses beyond the presumptions of equivalence underpinning standard translation practices as well as cultural dichotomies such as East/West, enables us to better observe "the process by which new words, meanings, discourses, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, or in spite of, the latter's contact/collision with the guest language."[115] Such a methodology proves fruitful in observing the "barbarous" linguistic alchemy taking place in experimental poetry, an alchemy that never manages to produce the dreamt-of universal language but that might generate artifacts "buono a ogni latitudine" for those committed to the dance of listening and interpretation—artifacts forged from a language good enough to produce harmonics along the axis of North and South and to reach across each latitudinal spectrum.[116]

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The scholarship on multilingual literature has long been dominated by the concerns and suppositions of prose; few have challenged Bakhtin's characterization of the novel as the heteroglossic genre par excellence. Ramazani's 2009 and 2020 volumes on transnational and global poetics constituted pathbreaking departures from this generic lacuna, stressing the importance of verse as an essential locus of cross-cultural exchange, fully integrated in rather than aloof to globalization, and acting as more provocative material for thought by sustaining losses in translation.[117] Ironically, although Amitav Ghosh upholds the fluid traffic between imperfectly mastered tongues that takes place in linguistically rich regions such as the Indian subcontinent against the "serial monolingualism" of European cosmopolitans, he proposes that the novel is an inherently monolingual form, whose most innovative author may be "the one who is most economical in suggesting a diversity of tongues." Those writing in dialects, he contends, must submit to the linguistic stasis of the literary marketplace, even if "they are writing about a world that powerfully resists the linguistic stasis that novelistic conventions impose upon it."[118] Ghosh notes that in attempting to convey the dialect of the Bengal Delta in *The Hungry Tide* (2004), he deployed a metrical form, dwipodi poyar, widely used in Bengali devotional poetry, in passages of "verse disguised as prose."[119]

Building upon yet departing from the critical and curatorial work of Werner Sollors on multilingual America and hailing from a community of poet-critics such as Charles Bernstein, Erín Mouré, Yunte Huang, Mark Nowak, and Juliana Spahr that has devoted decades of criticism and curation to illuminating multilingual or intralingual writings as sites of "social utterance and social inscription," Sarah Dowling's 2018 volume *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism* devotes itself to North American poets from the 1980s forward rooted in women of color feminism. Dowling stresses the genocidal quality of what she calls "settler monolingualism," framed as a core component of neoliberal multiculturalism that prevails in discussions of multilingual, macaronic, and exophonic texts that package foreignized signifiers for safe incorporation.[120] Dowling focuses on poetic artifacts that embrace untranslatability and noncomprehension in order to trace their complication of theories of personhood. It remains to be seen how the critical writings on translingual poetics by poets, translators, and critics like Eugene Ostashevsky, Johannes Göranssen, and Uljana Wolf, who hail from and are more explicitly linked to non-Anglophone poetics than the above scholars, will affect the critical discourse.[121]

The geopolitical montage of my study differentiates itself from both Ramazani's broad and Dowling's focalized analyses in tracing the collective political visions (and nightmares) embedded in xenoglossic poetry. Hovering between Pentecost and Babel, between the legibility of "universal" exchange and the total illegibility

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implied by opacity—in the apparent absence of a Holy Ghost that would render all communication transparent—twentieth-century xenoglossic poetry relies on a certain communicability in order to operate on a more-than-individual realm, in order to envision a collective more expansive than the citizenry as currently conceived. Its optics are closer to that of a veil or a fog, to utilize the metaphorics of Etel Adnan, and its sonics "off-key," to quote an early editor of Amelia Rosselli. Xenoglossia's discomfiting quality, I argue, lies precisely in its arduous legibility—a legibility that demands the unlearning of realms of mastery dictated by hegemonic education systems. Departing from the apparent contradiction between aesthetic revolution and compliance with authoritarianism enmeshed in the work of the historical avant-garde, I sound that tainted legacy in the postwar period as an influence rarely named but rather channeled toward utopian ends. These writings flesh out syllable by syllable Steiner's contention that "Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is".[122]

I draw exempla from a corpus integrating literary, visual, and performed arts and provide historical frames for the ways that successive generations of authors contend with the dual opportunity/threat of global networking and translation; each chapter focuses on artists tapping into a different medium, spanning visual poetry and artists' books, sculpture, music, calligraphic painting, and vocal performance. The artifacts I examine have been difficult to access, both because of their rarity and because poems with emphatic visual or aural traits tend to be treated as eccentric within literary discourse and marginal within art history (though this is finally beginning to change).[123] Situating these inventive modes of expression in an international context of experimental poetry hosting the interchange of European, Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and colonial and Indigenous American languages, the manuscript strives to further unsettle designations of center and periphery through fresh juxtapositions that permit us to think more capaciously about the aftermath and enduring resonance of fascist myths of tribes, and to read language politics now manifest in global neopopulist upheavals through the lens of earlier refusals. Although inspired by the poetics of polyglot practitioners such as Paul Celan, this manuscript highlights the poetic wake of a strain of Fascism that garners less attention within Anglophone contexts—that of the belated nation-state of Italy, where the population's relationship to a newly imposed national language and its accompanying claims as a mother tongue were exceptionally tenuous and fraught.

While scanning varied modes of poetic expression and situating them in an international context of experimental poetry hosting the interchange of global languages, this study focuses on a constellation of paralanguages that interact with English and Italian. English, the vehicle of British colonialism and US-led

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globalization—whose power and ubiquity are so threatening as to trigger Japanese novelist Minae Mizumura to ask, "What will become of all the national languages that are not English?"—is an obvious choice for elaboration, whereas Italian—a seemingly minor European tongue still contending with countless regional dialects, an uncontrolled discharge by emigrants, and the ghost of the Roman Empire—presents an instructive counterexample.[124] By the mid-twentieth century, literary Italian had still not consolidated the cultures of linguistically diverse speakers on the Italian peninsula and islands, despite being theorized and invented by Dante to heal the wound of Babel seven hundred years prior and multipronged Fascist campaigns to standardize and enforce the autarky of language. Moreover, despite a mounting and dynamic if relatively belated critical record, the Italian strain of Fascism—which became a synecdoche for the phenomenon, as Eco reminds us—is still underrepresented as a touchpoint in comparative literary studies and has as much to teach outsiders about violent yearnings toward brotherhood in language and beyond as Nazism. In fact, given that Italian Fascism grows directly out of revolutionary modernism, it constitutes an essential chapter in the relentless pursuit by populist demagogues of what Walter Benjamin called the "aestheticization of politics" (an aestheticization widely interpreted as the "manipulation of cultural symbology to bring about the pervasive nationalization of intellectual, academic, and artistic life," or the engineering of the semblance of a social revolution for the masses ultimately aimed at cynical reactionary ends).[125] As increasing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants arrive on Italian shores, the question of italianità has once again reared its head, calling for reflection on the figures who expressed this literary tradition's inherently polyglot nature and capacity—for the homogenization of idioms effected by mass media in the postwar period (following upon the Fascist project of Italianization) has not quelled the deep-seated clashes of history, disposition, and socioeconomic circumstance reflected in poetry.

My opening chapter, "Wireless Imagination: Futurist Delusions of Autarky and the Dream (or Nightmare) of a Transnational Language," explores the inspiration drawn by first-wave European modernism from a technology that laid the framework for "the globe" as a construct produced by data networks enabling immediate communication and command across national borders: the wireless telegraph, which made possible a new form of military intelligence as well as increased economic and cultural interchange. I explore F. T. Marinetti's Futurist works of "words-in-freedom" inspired by two waves of Italian colonial aggression in Libya and Ethiopia—ventures enabled by the wireless telegraph as well as the weakening of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter explores the apparent contradiction between the cosmopolitan embrace of global telecommunications and Marinetti's early roots in Alexandria, Egypt, and the rapacious forms

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of nationalism that rendered Futurism so valuable to the Italian Fascist regime. It goes on to detail how Futurism and Fascism colluded to generate a species of supranationalism consonant with colonial expansion in Africa and a program of autarky involving the paranoid expulsion of foreign "contaminants" from a national language that was newly introduced and, in fact, foreign to many of those on the Italian peninsula and islands who were suddenly supposed to speak it as natives. The acme of the Marinetti section focuses on *The Poem of the Milk Dress*, a collaborative artist's book produced with the designer Bruno Munari that glorifies the notorious 1935 Fascist invasion of Ethiopia, taking note of the global outcry by pan-Africanists, Socialists, and the League of Nations that this invasion provoked. I close by contrasting Marinetti's colonial multilingualism with polyglot poetry by an artist-emigré in New York City: as a counterpoint to the Futurists' rabid ultranationalism, I present the "Baroness" Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Dadaist and "future Futurist," as a poet of geopolitically uncertain extraction who presages the xenoglossic writing to be practiced by the writers in the remainder of the volume. This first chapter serves as an admonition that multilingualism and aperture to "global" expression do not necessarily lead to subversion of a fortressed national language and culture; on the contrary, in the majority of Italian Futurist works, "foreign" signifiers and the global reach of the wireless merely prop up a more efficient, accelerated form of supranationalism, which is to say, in this case, white supremacist imperialism.

The heart of the book, in chapters 2 through 4, is devoted to postwar writers operating in the wake of the Fascist decades of ultranationalism encompassing the barbarism of colonial rule and its uneven disintegration. Each author here represents a xenoglossic or unlearned approach to "mother tongues" deemed external to them; each experiments within a different constellation of national, subnational, or anational languages as a result of experience in a different geopolitical situation of exile; and in each chapter, I highlight an artist's turn toward a different medium of composition to create more accommodating stanzas for translingual contact (without reducing each author's body of work to a single schematic form). These media include visual poetry, "oggetti di poesia" or sculptural poems, and the artist's book in Emilio Villa, music and sound in Amelia Rosselli, and painting and calligraphy in Etel Adnan.

Chapters 2 and 3 trace the work of postwar poets whose visual and musicological research unfolded in tandem (and sporadic exchange) with the global evolution of concrete poetry and the Darmstadt School of New Music, in conversations between artists across the globe that strove to elicit the common roots of tongues in a "pure phonetic ideology."[126] These are the book's longest sections because these complex figures and their milieux require substantial introduction

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for an Anglophone audience, lacking robust bodies of criticism in English despite the rising trends in publication and translation of their work over the past several years. Moreover, the chapters work to flesh out the political and cultural obtrusions of global Fascism and their long shadow beginning with the immediate aftermath. Chapter 2, "Antifascist Philology and the Rejection of Linguistic Purity in Emilio Villa," introduces to the Anglophone comparative context a pathbreaking poet, translator, art critic, and radical philologist whose disgust for Italian authoritarian nationalism led him to a cross-disciplinary venture in the comparative history of planetary art and poetry at the São Paulo Museum of Art. Villa's relentless work through and against what he lampooned as the "Ytalyan" language would include an etymological dictionary aimed at dismantling the phantasm of European coherence and the "myth" of "Romance" languages through research into their Eastern roots; he trained in Semitic languages during the Fascist ventennio, abandoned the academy at the outbreak of war to continue his work in a climate of escalating anti-Semitism, and pursued large-scale comparative or better, transcultural projects for the rest of his life, often in isolation and in flight from academic or mainstream validation. His translation of the first lines of Genesis from the Hebrew represents the "Spirit of God" as Bird-Hurricane-Turbine-God with Mesopotamian and Egyptian antecedents—tropes confusing or suturing Eastern and Western cosmogonies and upending doctrinal notions of the Trinity, whose possible Pentecost and attendant geopolitical implications emerge as undeniably heretical. Villa goes on to forge extraterritorial poetic forms such as the "hydrology"—a sculptural ball filled with water whose screen-printed verses rendering English, Italian, and French hazy are designed to be read in rolling motion, upending "ideology" through a dizzying and estranging linguistic hybridity.

Chapter 3, "Amelia Rosselli's Disintegrating Canto(n)s and the Holy Ghost of Parental Tongues," explores the utopian metrical strategies adopted by the daughter of an assassinated hero of the global antifascist resistance, who developed a "cube-form" into which the rhythms of all languages might be convoked. Although Rosselli, born in Paris as a refugee from Fascist Italy and a "child of the Second World War," lacked a clear mother tongue, she committed to composing her public work largely in Italian for love of the country her father had been murdered in attempting to liberate—or rather, to composing in a singular Italian idiolect bruised by the traces of the French and English in which her mother and grandmother were obliged to raise her in exile. The chapter contrasts Rosselli's tentative adoption of Italy as a literal fatherland with her aspirations to build a stanza, or canto(n), capable of hosting congregations of polyrhythmic "panmusic," and contrasts such dreams of harmony with the discomposure triggered by

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her notoriously "foreign" performing accent and cadence. If "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," as Adorno claimed, these poets compose rejoinders to Fascism by seizing upon the barbarism within the Italian language and revealing the residue of the alien, the unintelligible, within it, while dreaming of an ideal nationality.

Chapter 4 shifts the geopolitical constellation to address the aftermath of European colonialism from a different edge of the Mediterranean, via Etel Adnan, a contemporary of Villa and Rosselli whose formative experiences as a writer and painter took root following the efforts of cultural and linguistic homogenization undertaken by both the modern Republic of Turkey and the French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon. In a 1989 essay, Adnan describes the trajectory of her relationship to Arabic—a tongue associated with shame and sin in the context of her French convent education in Beirut and a script newly purged from the nationalist Turkey of Atatürk in which her parents met, which her Syrian father had her copy from an Arabic-Turkish grammar book in ardent attempts at reparation. Her family's common languages were Turkish and French; Adnan acquired knowledge of Arabic writing through a channel more somatic than semantic. During the Algerian war of independence, when a dream of pan-Arab unity emerged, Adnan's attitude to the languages of her inheritance changed: "I didn't need to write in French anymore, I was going to paint in Arabic." This chapter, " 'Fog Is My Land': Etel Adnan's Painting in Arabic and the Reinvention of Belonging," tracks how this dream constitutes itself in Adnan's painting and poetry, and elicits the geopolitical implications of readers' attempts to parse the hybrid sign systems that result. Adnan's queer xenoglossia, merging writing and painting, calligraphy and drawing, and transcription and supralinguistic gesture, compels those who confront it to grapple past their comfort zones of literacy and to revise reigning discursive categories of cultural nativity and affinity, citizenship and statelessness.

Chapter 5, "Glottal Stop: Xenoglossic Breathing and Transmutations of the Mother Tongue in LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs," leaps into the contemporary moment, to the turn of the millennium, which is to say the full-blown moment of globalization, to ask how translingual writing might move beyond the sunny surface multiculturalism propounded by both neoliberal and authoritarian states in this period, producing a field of difference that challenges the uptake of minor tongues by hegemonic colonial languages. This chapter turns to the performance and theorization of breathlessness by women poets of the Black African diaspora to extend the thinking of Fred Moten, Nathaniel Mackey, Saidiya Hartman, and Christina Sharpe on statelessness and transhistorical maternal trauma. It shows how studied incorporation of breathing techniques from non-"mother" tongues

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opens language to new forms of performative kinship. Diggs's work across languages through gravely ruptured open fields of phonemes invokes Pentecost, yet her poetry proposes an alternative, xenoglossic rather than glossolalic strain of the "radical sociality" Ashon T. Crawley traces to practices of *Blackpentecostal Breath*—a strain in which "speaking in tongues" hosts the arduous splitting and fusing of natural languages produced and lost through settler colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, and their reverberation through state-sponsored police violence. In Diggs's Blackpentecostal open-field verse, the languages of empire are subjected to performative enunciation acquired through the independent study of Indigenous languages. Without disavowing the Indigenous right to sovereignty or the catastrophic endangerment or disappearance of Native languages, the xenoglossic poetry of Diggs makes an oblique argument not only for language revitalization but also for the forging of solidarities across linguistic difference and specifically across populations of color throughout the world, who are convoked into a new, more capacious "village." Diggs's interpolation of the glottal stop present in Indigenous languages into phrasings from dominant tongues permits the apprehension of what M. NourbeSe Philip calls "prepositional breathing"—breathing for another, as in the experience of motherhood before birth—to rush to the surface while reckoning with the gravity of ancestral breath lost. Such work implicitly revises Charles Olson's individualist and patriarchal theorization of projective composition by field as manifesting "certain laws and possibilities of breath, of the breathing of the man who writes," and proposes that we shift conceptions of language as possession to conceptions of language as modulation of inescapably shared breath, shared bequest.[127]

My coda, "A Xenoglossic Community to Come: Belonging by Rogue Translation in Sawako Nakayasu and Sagawa Chika's *Mouth: Eats Color*," extends the argument beyond my close case studies to ponder how criticism can respond to a growing number of book environments being produced during the twenty-first century in which "we are all orphans," in the words of Don Mee Choi—a condition very different from the rather more straightforward and common claim, "we are all immigrants," as it lacks a clear origin or conciliatory destiny. The emerging body of xenoglossic poetry, I argue, provides the blueprint for a community both past—the heady moment of modernist collectivity and exchange, dampened by ultranationalism—and to come, in which poetic expression may take the form of what Naoki Sakai calls "heterolingual address."[128] Poetic artifacts such as Sawako Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color*, a mischievously ludic translation that is really a collaboration with eclipsed Japanese modernist Sagawa Chika, entreat us as readers and critics to implode our own domains of literacy in order to reconstellate the universe of divided languages and clans—however provisionally

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and ephemerally. My argument is fundamentally dedicated to reimagining the form and expectation of the academic monograph in order to make such implosion of authorial domain possible through studious unlearning; that is, I try to introduce a more collaborative, speculative, and above all humble dimension to a genre typified by assumptions, demands, and proofs of mastery (which lead in turn to chronic blind spots and provincial self-referentiality in academic discourse). Through the catalyst of *Mouth: Eats Color*, I propose that, over the course of groping at understanding such linguistic collages, the first-person plural may become a vector not of the universality of expression but of the mutual vulnerability in efforts to understand one another across our incongruities.

TWO "PENTECOSTS" WITHIN THE NEW BABEL: FORTUNATO DEPERO AND AMELIA ROSSELLI IN NEW YORK

Before plunging into a thorough study of colonial Futurism, it will prove instructive to come full circle and return to New York for a glimpse of two species of multilingualism analyzed in this book: the supranational and the xenoglossic. As one of the few Italian Futurists who had a lived experience of the cosmopolis of New York, Fortunato Depero (Fondo 1892–Rovereto 1960) represents a fascinating punctum in the landscape of Futurist output, operating more waveringly across nationalist and internationalist ambitions than his elder, the movement's leading instigator, F. T. Marinetti did.[129] Depero hailed from a town in the None Valley of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol that had toponyms in three languages: Italian (as Fondo), German (as Pfund), and the Nones dialect, which has been linked to Ladin and was being suppressed in favor of Italian during the Fascist period of Italianization (as Fón). Early on, he took up his Futurist forebears' idiom-destabilizing call for onomatopoeic compositions, producing what he called "onomalingua," a species of sound poetry that still gestures in some way toward identifiable linguistic cultures (as in one 1916 "Noiseist Song" ("Canzone Rumorista") in a "Chinese rhythm").[130] The sojourn of this second-wave Futurist in what he called "New York New Babel" coincided with a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment culminating in the openly racist restrictive covenants surrounding entry to the United States, introducing interference to the exultant quashing of borders within this plurilingual sound poetry. Depero's frictional Fascist modernism thereby registers as alternatively euphoric and cowed.

Depero traveled from Genoa to New York City with his now-famous bolted book, or portable museum for auto-réclame, on the heels of the US Emergency

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Quota Act of 1921 and its revision in the Immigration Act of 1924. This legislation, an outgrowth of the Dillingham Commission, aimed to restrict the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans, particularly Italians and Jews, to the United States, and to radically reduce African immigration and shut down Asian and Arab immigration altogether. In an understanding atypical within his circle that the metropolis that so impressed, or pressed upon, James with its swarm of cultures was destined to be a new center of art in the West, Depero persevered in his attempt to become a New York success from 1928 to 1930, setting up a short-lived Casa Futurista for display of his own work and dreaming of founding a Futurist school and village on the city outskirts. These plans were ill-timed, equally beleaguered by the stock market crash and the Great Depression. Depero's applications for state funding were largely unsuccessful because Mussolini's regime still enjoyed favor in the United States and, until the Ethiopian Campaign of 1935 featured in chapter 1, the nation of Italy had no exceptional need to instrumentalize contemporary artists in the service of propaganda. To make matters worse, Depero's radical aesthetic did not fit in with the conservative Italian community in the city—and he relied heavily on that community because he had no access to English. Though the trip proved to be a commercial disaster, Depero managed to elevate his experience to the status of myth—even choosing to publish his memoirs in English and to revisit the city after the Second World War.

Depero understood early on that the city of skyscrapers that had inspired the Futurist visions of Antonio Sant'Elia and Umberto Boccioni, and the conglomerate nation whose roiling energies these buildings represented, was an avenue through which Italian artists might "define and re-define their own modernity," as Raffaele Bedarida points out.[131] My interest here is to discuss the hold New York had on Depero's imagination as a New Babel and his politically aestheticized, reactionary response. As transport and technology enabled people and languages to travel ever greater distances and as skyscrapers assuming the proportions of the biblical tower rose to contain them, we can easily understand how the myth of Babel would impassion modernist authors in the West: with the growth of polyglot metropolises condensing the sense of linguistic confusion, the myth continues to be revisited in secular contexts. Babel occupies a crucial role in Fritz Lang's 1927 *Metropolis*, whose set was famously inspired by the director's 1924 trip to New York (figure 0.5), although the film's fanciful rewriting of the fable suggests that the tower was destroyed not because of human hubris and divine retribution but because laborers and ruler, or mind, spoke the same language yet lacked a mediator who would help them comprehend one another's intentions. Depero created his own series of designs and accompanying publicity campaigns for a ballet of moving sets conceived for Broadway's Roxy Theater titled *New York New Babel*,

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FIGURE 0.5 The Tower of Babel as depicted in a still from *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang, written by Thea von Harbeau, produced by Erich Pommer, with cinematography by Carl Freund and Günther Rittau, 153 minutes, 1927.

although it was turned down, and Depero's misfortune in the city meant that, like the tower, it was never realized. "In no other place on earth can one find oneself so alone and lost as in New York," he wrote; "one's language is different, one's life different; faces, hearts, mouths and wallets armored" amid "the apocalyptic spectacles of unreachable Babel."[132] In this writing, the multiple Towers of Babel signify metaphorical foils to success in the cruel city of isolated strangers. Depero's visual free-word tableaus try to materialize this allegory, to reconstruct the form and baffling soundscape of the New Babel orthographically. Despite the references to Babel, however, languages foreign to Depero's own appear only rarely, in the proper names of the city and of the buildings he seeks to erect alphabetically.

Depero's visual poem "State of Mind in New York" (figure 0.6) expresses, in the artist's signature visual vocabulary of advertising and propaganda, the paradox of being seduced by Babel as an ambitious young Italian artist following Mussolini's 1922 March on Rome. The iconic visage depicted through line and orthography represents the (Italian) words for CHINEEESE/RUSSIAN/FREENCH and ENGLISH/GREEK/GERMAN permeating its ears and brain and syncretic emblems of Depero's transnational art-business plans raining upon it from above (the token foreign phrase that appears in this poem is the English "A-B-C-OF-ITALIAN-FUTURISM" within this spectrum). The figure's steely face recalls the ubiquitous representations of the dictator himself propagated in

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FIGURE 0.6 Fortunato Depero, *Stato d'animo a New York* (*State of Mind in New York*), 1930. Private collection. Copyright Archivio Depero.

public space during the Fascist ventennio (figure 0.7); amid the ray- or rodlike lines that issue from the other side of this sort of mediator's head, Depero has crafted a verbal "FLAG OF OPTIMISM" seemingly waving in the wind and saluting the exalted totems of Marinetti and Mussolini (W equals "evviva," or "LONG LIVE MUSSOLINI," "LONG LIVE MARINETTI," in an only faintly heretical key). The words MOLTIPLICARSI (to multiply oneself) and CORAZZARSI (to armor or protect oneself) form the dome of the icon's head; the eyes, mouth, and ears are in fact doubled and quadrupled, creating a typically Futurist sense of motion that here, however, registers as destabilizing vibration or vacillation, aided by the zigzagging onomatopoeic "SSSSSSSS . . ." and "TRRRRRRR . . ." above. The incursion of the foreign into the orifices of hearing has a vaguely threatening, because deracinating, effect. As if to steady the dizziness, the word FERMO (still; steadfast) brands the figure's forehead in a phallic vertical column, and the image's base is formed by the words "AUTO FASCIO DI VOLONTÀ" (auto-fasces of will). The entire ensemble is bundled together in the form of the fasces invoked in this bottom line: the symbolic bundle of rods

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FIGURE 0.7 A propaganda poster featuring Mussolini's face overlaid upon the word "yes" repeated dozens of times, erected briefly on Palazzo Braschi in Rome (headquarters of the dictator in Piazza di San Pantaleo) to garner support during the uncontested 1934 Italian general election (which involved a yes–no vote). Anonymous photographer. Courtesy of Archivio Luce, Cinecittà Spa.

surrounding an axe that symbolizes Fascist unity and power, hearkening back to the ancient power literally to inflict corporal or capital punishment through the Roman imperium.[133] (Roman consuls were referred to as "the twelve fasces," in a fascinating symmetry with the later Christian apostles.) This visual fable falls short of true xenoglossia, although it functions visually as a Pentecost with Futurist Fascism or Fascist Futurism standing in for the Christian Holy Ghost.

Born into exile in Paris in 1930, the same year Depero constructed this "State of Mind" and retreated from his New Babel, the young Amelia Rosselli would arrive in New York State (Westchester County to be exact) a decade later with her mother, grandmother, aunt, and cousins: these were the families of Carlo and Nello Rosselli, assassinated heroes of the global Resistance, fleeing from Fascism's stranglehold on their former residences of Italy and France and from the Axis bombardment of England. Amelia would go on to produce one of the most singular bodies of poetry in the postwar period, one oscillating dynamically between

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species of Italian and English (and early on, French). Her corpus renders material Gramsci's observation—in his final, 1935 prison notebook surrounding "Grammar and national language" before death under conditional release from detention in Formia's Cusumano clinic—that whereas " 'normative grammars' tend . . . to create a unitary national linguistic conformism," "il fatto linguistico" ("the linguistic fact," placing uncommon emphasis on fact's active *facture*) "non può avere confini strettamente definiti" ("cannot have national borders strictly defined")—that "non [si] può immaginare la lingua nazionale fuori del quadro delle altre lingue, che influiscono per vie innumerevoli e spesso difficili da controllare su di essa" ("the national language cannot be imagined outside the frame of other languages that exert an influence on it through innumerable channels that are often difficult to control")—adding in a parenthetical, "Who can control the contribution of linguistic innovations indebted to repatriated emigrants, to travelers, to readers of foreign journals and languages, to translators, etc.?"[134] Hazarding the translation of Rosselli's oeuvre, an effort that lasted a dozen years and counting and that could not fully contain its theoretical-political aspirations, was the prod that led me to these pages.

English would be Rosselli's "mother tongue" had she not spat out the concept (though her father was Italian, her mother was English): although she was educated partly in Anglophone institutions, her more copious poetic production grafts itself to Italian, constituting an urge toward a father tongue and faulty patria, or fatherland. It is easy to see in the figure of the "hatchet" within the following 1953 poem composed in English the axe of the Italian fasces[135]:

> What woke those tender heavy fat hands
> said the executioner as the hatchet fell
> down upon their bodily stripped souls
> fermenting in the dust. You are a stranger here
> and have no place among us. We would have you off our list
> of potent able men
> were it not that you've never belonged to it.[136]

This piece appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on Bastille Day of 1966. Unlike the multilingual modernist work that incorporates stray foreign signifiers within an overall national linguistic fabric, as in the *Cantos*, and unlike the rowdily translingual linguistic pyrotechnics of *Finnegans Wake*, this poem in a hazily Elizabethan idiolect is couched entirely within English signifiers and yet discomfits. "The multilingual work that has been fashionable from Pound forward does not in fact interest me," Rosselli affirmed in an interview.[137] But something about this lyric seems off-key, constituted from the outside, from the position of the stranger

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herein banished (or so they would be had they ever belonged to the lyric's locus): the negative subjunctive ("were it not") and the hortative voices from historically afar, for instance. "Pray be away / sang the hatchet as it cut slittingly / purpled with blood."[138] Here and through the term "bodily" above, the placement of an adverb and its subtly estranging diction puts the "native" vaguely at sea; so does the "purpled," a substitution for the more expected "reddened" or "stained," which nevertheless puts us more vividly in mind of royalty and of the hierarchy in general to which the second person is subjected. These choices strike one as erroneous, yet no error can be pinned down, and one cannot resort to a stable, shared vernacular grammar in looking these usages up. They instead amalgamate an idiolect that—in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari's idiot, originally the private, nonexpert outsider, one uninitiated into Greek society—slows the mobilization of civilization and in the process, via micropolitical movements, resists consensus.[139] Hence the utility of the term xenoglossic in this case. The hatchet of the poem's authority—this ascia (hatchet, axe)—recalls the fascio whose Italian signifier haunts the whole composition from just outside the gates. Despite the violently punitive tone of this scene, that axe falls upon "bodily stripped souls": souls that are either incongruously "bodily" (which do indeed go off, perhaps sexually, "to enjoy an hour's agony / with our saintly Maker") or else are stripped of their bodies, already fermenting. That is to say, the hatchet falls upon dust; authority may fall as well as the souls, already immaterial and already "outside," slip out from under its dead weight.

In the opening of a 1965 lyric written in English and published in 1966 in the Paris-based *Art and Literature* under John Ashbery's editorship, the first person echoes Whitman but with a difference: "radioactive confusion bit into my / brain radiant with multitudes."[140] Rather than containing multitudes or steeling the self against confusion as in her male forbears, Rosselli deploys a nuclear metaphor that bites into the integrity of the subject and her mind, rendering the multitudes within the brain radiant. This gnawing, dazzling action could be a figure for Rosselli's operations upon each queasily national language in which she writes. Such biting and corrosion of the subject and mind in favor of multitudes resist the notion of any god or authority who "chancels," to cite my literal translation from the Italian lyric "o dio che ciangelli," which the poet glossed for Pier Paolo Pasolini as an echo of the English term "to chancel" as well as "cangiare," a poetic term for change, or cambiare, and "cianciare" (to chatter), with reference to "cancello" (gate), "augelli" (a poetic term for uccelli, or birds), or "angeli" (angels), as well as "cancellare" (to erase).[141] This constellation of meanings, in forcing flight beyond the partitions of any chancellor's dominion, undoes the authority it names. In the central and in many ways the core chapter of this book, I will ask us to listen for these heretical, (un-)holy ghostings of languages beyond

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national dominion as harmonic in the musicological sense. For now, the reader may wish to listen to the recitation of "What woke those tender heavy fat hands" in English and Italian translation included in broadcast #3 of "With the hatchet at one's back: 10 years without Amelia Rosselli," which I have archived at PennSound|Italiana for safekeeping.[142] The musicality of Rosselli's recitations, with their illocatable "accent" and defamiliarizing accentuation of both languages, nearly sung in ways that cut across sense, causes these pieces to hover above their language(s) of composition on the aural front.

Rosselli's territorially uncontainable voice finds an "abracadabrant" analog in the extended vocal technique that pervades the work of Meredith Monk—both constituting musical parallels to the concord and dissonance of the myriad languages filing into New York that so discomposed James and that inspired Depero's firm "state" of mind. One must imagine—or can simply choose to witness in ongoing history—the secular day to day of encounter between irreconcilable languages in the metropolis encompassing myriad instances of discomposure and self-steeling as Depero portrays, and James before him, leading to countless less cross-examined silences in the written historical and literary record. Meredith Monk gives a different kind of body to such lapses in her 1981 musical film *Ellis Island*, which in reanimating the ruins of the storied processing station prior to its restoration strategically deprives viewers of the diegetic soundscape of Babel generated by turn-of-the-century migrations.[143] Immigrants being asked their names upon arrival are shot from the back, faceless, without an accompanying vocal. Intertitles as of silent film stand in for their mistranscribed voices, while their quantified, measured, and taxonomized identities are set against the disembodied writing hand of an intake functionary (figure 0.8). Immigrants taking dictation in English, being taught nouns for household appliances and Empire State monuments in their language lessons, are shown mouthing a pedantic schoolmarm's audible voicings in absolutely muted mimicry, their live mixing of accents pruned to harsh, even jarring filmic silence. With nearly twelve thousand immigrants passing through Ellis Island on a single day in 1907, as the film's contemporary tour guide narrates amid the dust in a cascade of overlapping languages, one can imagine how many instances of foundering communication would have prevailed in the inspection stations and streets of the day. Monk carves these silences through editing and then punctuates the moments between with overdubbed vibratory, melismatic syllables sung, her deployment of extended vocal technique as piercing as a whistle, yet forging through its multiphonic vowels the effect of multiple languages, accents, and affects. Such effects exist in tension with the more idealistic notion of the "world vocal family" of which Monk speaks in interviews, with the human voice cast as the original instrument that can transcend cultural difference.[144]

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FIGURE 0.8 Still from *Ellis Island*, conceived and directed by Meredith Monk, produced and codirected by Bob Rosen, with cinematography by Jerry Pantzer, 28 minutes, 1981.

The implicit chorality produced in Monk's incongruous sporadic voicings provides a correlative for the xenoglossic poetry I am confronting in its vibratory dissonance. The eerie muteness that accompanies Monk's disarmingly moving images—filmed to record the minute vacillations of immigrants standing still to be captured as photographs, files, and specimens for absorption or ejection—underscores the ghosting not only of these individuals but also of the policy of open borders that made Ellis Island a historical crossroads teeming with abracadabrant accents of the future. With the passing of the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924, the era of mass immigration in the United States would come to an abrupt close and the role of the island would shift to that of a detention and deportation processing station. The doubling down on languages of the "tribe" that was soon to follow would pave the way for the fraught reception of the xenoglossic poetries I seek to recover in these chapters—through readings that will cast them not as alien, but as more broadly representative of the homely and unheimlich production of language at the crossroads of entry and expulsion.

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